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JUNE 16, 2008
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Letters

Feminists: the Hillary Divide

OCONOMOWOC, WIS.

Thank you for Betsy Reed's intelligent and perceptive "Race to the Bottom: How Hillary Clinton's Campaign Has Divided the Feminist Movement" [May 19]. She quotes Frances Kissling as saying, "If Clinton wins, the older-line women's movement will continue.... If she doesn't win, it will be a death knell for those people. And that may be a good thing—that a younger generation will start to take over."

But there's another possibility. If Hillary Clinton were to win the nomination but lose the general election, the backlash would be unrecoverable in our lifetime. It took years to get past Geraldine Ferraro's stinging loss in the VP slot—years, and a woman who could position herself as a near-incumbent.

Clinton's choice to run as someone who shoots whiskey and will obliterate Iran is unfortunate for many reasons, but the biggest problem with this approach is that she will not be able to out-cowboy McCain. Many are worried that her actions are tearing the Democratic Party apart, but I fear she is doing far more damage to the feminist movement. Perhaps merely having a woman on the ballot is a large step forward, but her approach to this race continues to be an even larger step back.

STACI LEIGH O'BRIEN

WALNUT CREEK, CALIF.

With regard to "How Hillary Clinton's campaign has divided the feminist movement": I believe it is Obama's 2008 bid for the presidency that has divided us. He should have waited until 2012. I support Hillary because I admire her brilliance and fortitude. I think that she can better rectify the Bush/Cheney disasters and lead us through these daunting times most effectively.

CELIA MENCZEL

SANTA CRUZ, CALIF.

Betsy Reed's "Race to the Bottom" is a wonderful article that well explores the difficulties of feminism inherent in the choice for Obama versus Clinton. It is

letters@thenation.com



only missing one thing—Obama has been subtly working the gender angle as deliberately as Clinton has been working the race angle. Check out his sly sexist messages, such as talking about the wives of male officeholders ("X and his lovely wife, Y, who is his true asset") and how he pulls out chairs for Clinton at debates and speaks to her with the barely concealed ridicule of men in power—"You're likable enough, Hillary." These behaviors make it clear that women are not yet fully accepted in positions of power. And that Obama is continuing that tradition.

ANDI THOMAS

MEDFORD, MASS.

Betsy Reed's "Race to the Bottom" disturbs me to the core. Hillary Clinton did not engage in a unilateral character assassination of Barack Obama, nor did she play the race card any more than his campaign played (brilliantly and seamlessly) the misogyny card. And the left-wing press bought his strategy hook, line and sinker. Not a scintilla of examination of the tactics of Axelrod and Plouffe—his senior advisers. Who among Obama's senior team is African-American, or Latino, or a woman? He is as mainstream a male politician as any. But the media swoon over him like a teenager with a first crush.

I find myself rooting for Clinton *not* because I am an "old" feminist, *not* because I am an old lefty but because I believe that she would do an infinitely better job as President in this incredibly dangerous and complex world that the Bush/Cheney years have deeded to us all. Smooth words and good looks are not enough for me. Give me the experience, the toughness, the brilliance, the depth and the historical significance of Hillary Clinton, who—oh, by the way—happens to be a woman.

AUDREY ROTH

ALBUQUERQUE

I agree with Betsy Reed. However, I have to take issue with her about Hillary Clinton "threatening to 'totally obliterate

(continued on page 38)

A Progressive Push

The Democratic primary season that ends June 3 will have seen rousing highs and distressing lows. From the beginning, we have cheered the grassroots spirit that pushed the

candidates in a more progressive direction on issues like the war, the economy and the environment. We've hailed record-breaking voter registration and turnout. Throughout it all, we've supported Hillary Clinton's right to stay in the race until the last poll closes, because we believe all voters should be participants, not spectators, in the electoral process; and we hope their mobilization will translate into lasting gains for a budding progressive majority.

But we have also warned of the dangers of the Clinton campaign's slouch along the low road. This tendency was on full display in late May, when Clinton insensitively invoked Robert Kennedy's June 1968 assassination as a rationale for her continued candidacy in the face of a delegate deficit that cannot be surmounted—at least by voting. Her comparison of the fraudulent elections in Zimbabwe to the dispute over the seating of Michigan's and Florida's delegations is outlandish and reveals a campaign fixated on its future instead of the issues. That is why we urge the superdelegates to make their decision expeditiously on June 4 so that Americans can refocus on what is at stake in this defining election.

The general election campaign will find the Republicans in delicious disarray, hamstrung by their commitment to a disastrous war and to unfettered capitalism as well as by their incompetence, corruption and cronyism. And yet, even with such fertile terrain for progressives, there are limits to the discussion as it is refracted through a presidential campaign. We have endorsed Barack Obama and are cautiously encouraged by his promise to end the war and to re-engage the world through diplomacy and fair trade; we applaud his embrace of more populist themes that highlight the need for universal healthcare and the perils of growing

income inequality. (Meanwhile, John McCain equates diplomacy with appeasement and proposes more tax breaks for the superrich.) But our endorsement of

Obama is not a blank check. Electing him is a crucial first step toward repairing the vast

damage Republicans have wrought. Progressives should use this moment to drive issues into the campaign that have been missing from the conversation.

Where is the challenge to the bloated military budget, which equals the total amount spent by the rest of the industrialized world? Who's talking about an exit from the "war on terror," which has made us less secure while curtailing our civil liberties? Where is the massive public investment to repair our collapsing bridges, breached levees and bursting schools? Democrats have called for a repeal of Bush's tax cuts for the wealthiest, but where are the proposals for a truly progressive tax system? Where is the challenge to corporate power and a serious strategy to empower workers to win their share of profits? Where are the comprehensive plans to deal with our deepening financial crisis and the tragedy of massive home foreclosures? Who's talking about our failed "war on drugs" and our faltering criminal justice system? And while there is growing demand that we leave Iraq, who's challenging Obama's plan to keep troops and bases there beyond 2009?

If the limits of the debate aren't pushed by the nascent progressive movement, we could miss a critical opening. Of course, progressives can't lose sight of the practicalities of registering voters and getting them to the polls. But this mobilization can also push the Democratic Party to think more boldly and dissent more creatively from the failed conservative consensus of the last quarter-century.

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Dave Zirin: Mary Tillman's story

Max Blumenthal: Lieberman and Hagee

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Katrina vanden Heuvel

NATION POLL

What's missing from the presidential debate?

CROSSWORD CLASSICS

Puzzles from the archive

Obama's Choice



As if the Democrats hadn't been forced into quite enough soul-searching by the Clinton-Obama death match, now comes the fraught matter of finding the right running mate for the survivor. A zillion strategic and ideological calculations are already knocking around the pundit sphere. Does the changemonger from Illinois need the ballast of a well-traveled centrist with gravitas, like Sam Nunn or Wesley Clark? Dare the Democrats choose another "first" to run with Obama—Hillary Clinton, Bill Richardson, Kathleen Sebelius? Would Obama/Clinton really be a "dream" or, as some fear, a ticket to eight years of debilitating power struggles and inter-necine Democratic warfare? Should the party try to use the VP slot to clinch a key state—with Ted Strickland in Ohio, Claire McCaskill in Missouri, Ed Rendell in Pennsylvania or Jim Webb in Virginia? Does it make more sense to look West, South or Industrial Belt? Is this the time for a no-excuses liberal like Russ Feingold, an evangelical do-gooder like Strickland or a working-class hero like John Edwards?

Exhausted voters don't get to (or have to) make this tricky call, of course. Neither, really, do the Democratic convention delegates—that docile studio audience who rubber-stamped Geraldine Ferraro in '84, Lloyd Bentsen in '88 and Joe Lieberman in '00. This one's up to Obama, who recently tapped old Washington hand Jim Johnson—the fellow who helped Mondale find Ferraro in '84 and Kerry pick Edwards in '04—to head up his search team. Let's hope the choice will be made with a full awareness of just how many political light-years we are removed from 1984—and from 2004. Obama should approach this decision not merely with an eye to winning 270 electoral votes, but with his sights set on the long term: finding the person who can do the most to broaden and invigorate the progressive-populist majority that is emerging in every part of the country.

Obama's strangest option is also his strongest. To many progressives, ex-Republican Jim Webb sounds like another centrist compromise—Lieberman in combat boots. After all, he's got that history as a Reagan-era Defense official and Navy Secretary in the 1980s. He's a proud Vietnam veteran. He adores firearms. He's criticized affirmative action for helping blacks but leaving out poor whites. He wrote a paleolithic op-ed against women in combat in 1979 and later called the Navy investigations of the Tailhook sexual assault scandal a "witch hunt." He's railed fiercely through the years at the "cultural Marxists" and '60s liberals who, he felt, demonized his fellow soldiers in Vietnam and blamed his fellow working-class whites for Jim Crow.

It's understandable that the heavy VP chatter about Webb has some progressives climbing the walls, accusing his male supporters of hopeless "man crushes" and declaring, as G Spot blogger Kathy G. did recently, "Ixnay on the Ebbway." But the Webb who became the Democrats' boldest antiwar champion of 2006, when he unseated popular senator George Allen, bears little resemblance to the ugly composite portrait that can be assembled by quoting his old apostasies (all now heavily qualified or recanted). Webb is, in many respects, the antithesis of Lieberman or Bentsen—"centrists" chosen not so much to appeal to independents as to placate Wall Street. While most reporters

Noted.

THIS BRAVE NATION: For decades, scholars have lamented the historical and civic illiteracy of the American public, blaming everything from the homogenized textbooks found in most classrooms to the gutting of civics courses to the all-consuming obsession with celebrity culture. Technology, in particular, seems to be a favorite culprit: in 1985 **Neil Postman's** jeremiad against television, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, warned of that relatively new medium's focus on entertainment over argument. Now it's the Internet that's to blame, as many young people get their ideas from web videos instead of from reading—or even watching TV news. But why not make technology your ally?

On Sunday, June 1, **This Brave Nation**—a video collaboration between *The Nation* and **Brave New Films**—will release the first in a five-part series of intergenerational conversations. A kind of “living history” project composed of short videotaped talks, **This Brave Nation** brings together the most intelligent, passionate and creative voices of one generation with the activists, journalists and artists of the next to dialogue on loves, lives, politics and history. Each discussion will be produced as both a five-minute video and a thirty-minute minidocumentary, which will be collected in a DVD box set. The first video is a talk between Ella Baker Center founder **Van Jones** and the longtime leader of the Sierra Club, **Carl Pope**. Other **This Brave Nation** participants include union organizer **Dolores Huerta** with musician **Bonnie Raitt**; activist and folk singer **Pete Seeger** with environmental justice organizer **Majora Carter**; ACLU director **Anthony Romero** with teenage peace activist **Ava Lowery**; and author, activist and politician **Tom Hayden** with *Nation* columnist and *Shock Doctrine* author **Naomi Klein**. Videos will be released each Sunday for four weeks leading up to a live event in Los Angeles on July 13.

Finally, **This Brave Nation** is sponsoring a related contest in which readers can nominate young heroes (under 30) who are making a difference in their local communities. Check out **BraveNation.com** and

nominate yourself or someone you know, view the series trailer and find out how you can be a part of **This Brave Nation**.

GOOD TO BEAT THE KING: The **Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW)**, a community-based organization of migrant agricultural workers in southwest Florida, scored a Whopper-sized victory on May 23 when **Burger King** agreed to improve wages and working conditions for farmworkers harvesting tomatoes for the company's Florida suppliers. Burger King had been refusing to pay a penny-per-pound surcharge to growers to support a wage hike—a plan industry rivals **Yum! Brands** and **McDonald's** agreed to in 2005 and 2007—but CIW's unwavering corporate-pressure campaign, a hearing chaired by Senator **Bernie Sanders** and reams of bad publicity finally forced the fast-food giant to cave.

The surcharge will mean at least a 40 percent salary increase for farmworkers often earning \$50 a day or less. Burger King also agreed to enforce strict workplace guidelines for its suppliers, in an industry where backbreaking work is the norm and forced labor is not uncommon. “The exploitation of farmworkers should not be tolerated in Florida,” testified *Fast Food Nation* author **Eric Schlosser** during the April Senate hearing. “It should not be tolerated anywhere in the United States. There are many social problems that are extremely difficult to solve. This is not one of them.”

JUSTICE FOR PAT TILLMAN: “If it had happened to someone else, Pat would be busting through walls to find the truth.” So said **Mary Tillman**, mother of NFL player turned Army Ranger **Pat Tillman**, who was killed in Afghanistan in April 2004 under shadowy circumstances. We were first told that Pat was killed by the Taliban. Then we were told it was a case of “friendly fire.” Now, after four years, seven investigations and two Congressional hearings, questions linger about how Pat died, why the circumstances of his death were covered up and who knew what when.

Mary Tillman and her family are determined to expose the cover-up surrounding Pat's death. They also want to take on a criminal Administration, an

illegal war in Iraq and the way entities like the National Football League have exploited Pat's memory while doing nothing to help the search for the truth.

The Nation's sports correspondent, **Dave Zirin**, spoke with Mary Tillman about her new book, *Boots on the Ground by Dusk: My Tribute to Pat Tillman*. Zirin was surprised to find not a grieving parent but a fierce advocate with the kind of steady strength that is simply humbling. An excerpt of Zirin's interview appears below; a full transcript is available at thenation.com.

DZ: It seems the NFL has taken many opportunities to commemorate Pat, but they don't want to get behind you. Do you think they want to have it both ways?

MT: I think they haven't gone out of their way to help; they've exploited Pat just like the military. I do believe that. I mean, they have a beautiful statue to him at Cardinal Stadium. I don't know if that's more for us or him; I feel like it's more for them. It's sad for me to say that, but I think it's true. They haven't really helped to try to find out what happened to Pat.

DZ: They have tremendous power as an entity...

MT: Oh, absolutely. But there has been no effort to find out. You know, and the fact that players who played with him wanted to wear his number [and] they wouldn't let them do that. It's a minor thing, I suppose, but at the same time I think it's kind of telling. It's like, “OK, we had the jersey dedication, we did this; let's move on.” I think that speaks a lot.

DZ: If you could say something to the last two NFL commissioners, Roger Goodell and Paul Tagliabue, if they were here right now, what would that be?

MT: Well, I would say to them that they exploited Pat no differently than the military. You know, this is a young man who was quite unique. He was trying to do the right thing, and it would be the right thing to try and find out what happened to him.

MAD ADS: On page 27 readers will find an ad paid for by **America's Leadership Team for Long Range Population-Immigration-Resource Planning**. Needless to say, we disagree with the ad's premise and politics. Our ad policy can be found at thenation.com/mediakit/policy/.

persist in describing him as a conservative, Webb has rapidly emerged as one of the Democrats' strongest voices from the left on the two great issues of the day: Iraq and economic fairness. He spent most of his 2006 campaign railing against the treachery of corporate America and trickle-down economics. Even more boldly than Obama, Webb spoke out against invading Iraq—in fact, he began arguing against it in the late 1980s, when the neo-cons were first beating those drums. In the Senate—as a freshman—he has been the single most clever and relentless Democrat in challenging Bush's Iraq policy, most recently steering through the new GI Bill. While his voting record is short, it's thus far prochoice, prolabor and pro-environment. For what it's worth, Webb got an A in 2007 from the progressive Drum Major Institute; perfect scores from NARAL, the National Education Association and the AFL-CIO; a 90 from the Children's Defense Fund; and an 85 from Americans for Democratic Action.

Virginia's thirteen electoral votes are already up for grabs, particularly with beloved former Governor Mark Warner running for the Senate and (along with Obama) driving up the Democratic vote in November. But one of the most powerful arguments for Webb is less pragmatic than symbolic: instead of just saying he honors the military and respects the white working class, Obama, by tapping Webb, would show it. Choosing Webb would also show Obama's willingness to have unorthodox and passionate thinkers around him. Webb would be the loudest and stubbornest "get out of Iraq" voice to have the President's ear. He would push Obama in a progressive direction on corporate re-regulation and income redistribution. And he would goad the President to think in fresh ways about old problems like the "war on drugs." Webb calls for ending the drug war in his new book, *A Time to Fight*, in which he furiously denounces the race-based injustice of US drug laws and the American incarceration industry. In it he imagines the lives led by an African-American youngster selling drugs and the white suburban teenager who buys them from him to sell at his school. "By the time the white kid reaches fifty years of age," Webb writes, "he may well be a judge. By the time the black kid reaches fifty, he will likely be permanently unemployable, will be ineligible for many government assistance programs, and will not even be able to vote."

Of all the various forms of inspiration Obama's campaign has

delivered, few have been more welcome than his promise to erase the red-blue divide. Obama has worked out most of the formula for a long-term national progressive majority: he's revived the hopes of black voters long overlooked by the party, honed a promising message for Latino workers and preached a fresh political gospel to younger voters of all races—people for whom Republicanism will forever be associated with Bush, Iraq, the religious right and subprime America. But for the new majority to emerge, the Democrats must also tap into the antiwar, populist energy that has swelled up among working-class and middle-class whites in formerly Republican territory. Webb would bring some much-needed fire and brimstone on the economic populist issues that captured red-state Senate seats for insurgent Democrats in 2006—not just in Virginia but in Ohio, Pennsylvania, Montana, Missouri and Minnesota.

After eight years of Bush and thirty years of middle-class decline, it won't take crippling compromises (like an antichoice, pro-war or pro-Wall Street Vice President) to make sufficient gains among these folks. But it will take a candidate on the national ticket who understands them, respects them and knows how to move them. Obama can pick between several distinguished and helpful partners for the Democratic ticket. But he cannot choose anyone who will speak to Western, Southern and Industrial Belt voters with more gut-level force, or do more to awaken these folks to the new progressive potential of their country, than Jim Webb.

But as far as the man crush goes, I'll stick with John Edwards.

BOB MOSER

The 'FCC-Word'

Lawyers used to joke that free speech includes the right to shout "fuck" in a crowded theater. But can Bono shout "fuck" at a crowded awards ceremony? Does the First Amendment still mean, as the late Justice John Marshall Harlan once wrote, that "the State has no right to cleanse public debate to the point where it is grammatically palatable to the most squeamish among us"?

COMMENT

Next term the Supreme Court will hear *Federal Communications Commission v. Fox Television Stations*, which pits aggressive puritans in the Bush Administration against aggressive sleazemongers in the Murdoch empire. But the stakes for American culture are much higher than the party lineup would suggest; at issue is whether a government bureaucracy is the legal arbiter of what is "legitimate" news coverage or "genuine" art.

In 1973 a progressive New York radio station broadcast a George Carlin monologue on "the seven words you can never say" on the public airwaves (in current FCC parlance, those would be "the S-word, the P-word, the F-word, the C-word, the C-sucker word, the M-F word and the T-word"). A member of a "decency in media" organization filed a complaint. The FCC disciplined the station for violating a federal statute that forbids broadcast licensees from transmitting "any obscene, indecent, or profane language by means of radio communications." The Court held that the commission could not totally ban speech like Carlin's, but it could require broadcasters to transmit it late at

Calvin Trillin, Deadline Poet

McCain and Lobbyists

No lobbyists will serve in his campaign,
Says now-and-then reformer John McCain.
That surely could reduce the payroll's heft:
It's possible he'll have no staffers left.
Deciding just to whom this rule applies
Is someone who's a lobbyist. Surprise!
Completing what the candidate's desiring
Necessitates an act of auto-firing.

Global warming.
50 million Americans uninsured.
Massive budget deficits.
Failing public schools.
A tarnished national image.
—
These are *not* policy failures.

ACTUALLY, these crises are the inevitable result of the policies we've chosen. Today's policies *were designed* to treat our dependence on oil as a given, our basic health as a luxury, an adequate education as a privilege, and our children's wealth as our own.

No, our policies are working *exactly* as designed. The problem is, they all spring from a framework of principles and morals that is broken and bankrupt. American politics today is dominated by a morality of short-term over long-term, every man for himself, might makes right, the lowest get the least, and actions without consequences.

If patriotism means "country before self," today's moral framework certainly is *not* patriotic. We can do better—and in these challenging times, we must.

Stewardship. Shared sacrifice. Mutual obligation. Responsibility for the common good. Equality of opportunity.



A pamphlet by
Eric Liu & Nick Hanauer

Available at
bookstores everywhere

These were the truly patriotic moral values that animated America's founding generation, and they are the principles we must return to if America is to sustain its greatness. We've written a little book that challenges each of us to answer the question: *What is true patriotism?* It's not a question of policy. It's a question of morality.

READ *THE TRUE PATRIOT*. JOIN THE CONVERSATION AT TRUEPAT.ORG.

night, when it is unlikely children would be listening.

In a 1971 case, *Cohen v. California*, the Court had held that a citizen could not be punished for wearing a jacket emblazoned with the motto "Fuck the Draft." In the opinion in which he denied government the power to "cleanse public debate," Justice Harlan noted that "one man's vulgarity is another's lyric." For nearly twenty-five years, the two decisions coexisted uneasily in broadcasting. The FCC fashioned the "fleeting expletive" rule: a station couldn't be punished for one or two "filthy words" in the course of a news report or drama.

Conservative members of Congress and right-wing advocacy groups never accepted this compromise. They wanted "indecent" speech off the air altogether. Conservatives also tried to extend the FCC's writ to policing cable-TV content as well as broadcast. That effort failed, but their "decency in broadcasting" crusade began to bear fruit with the accession of the current Administration. In 2003 the FCC rescinded the fleeting expletive rule, announcing that any use of bad words before 10 p.m. is forbidden. The commission threatened massive future fines against Fox, ABC and CBS for offenses like Bono's acceptance speech at the Golden Globes ("fucking brilliant"), Cher's salty words about her critics ("fuck 'em"), *NYPD Blue*'s Detective Sipowicz's cop argot ("dickhead") and Nicole Richie's remarks about *The Simple Life* ("Have you ever tried to get cow shit out of a Prada purse? It's not so fucking simple.") Last year, a panel of the Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit blocked the fines, reasoning that the FCC's change of heart on fleeting expletives was "arbitrary and capricious." On March 17 the Supreme Court scheduled the case for a hearing next term.

It's hard to summon a lot of sympathy for Fox TV, which has pushed the envelope in exploitative trashy content. Bono, Cher and Nicole Richie can also probably take care of themselves. But there are ominous words in the government's petition for Supreme Court review: the FCC "has pending before it hundreds

of thousands of complaints regarding the broadcast of expletives." That's no exaggeration. In 2000 the FCC received 111 complaints about "indecent" on broadcast TV. In 2006 that number had soared to 327,198. Much of the increase is driven by advocacy groups like the Parents Television Council, which sense an opportunity in the right-wing drift of the commission under Bush. Complaints have targeted popular programs like *Friends*, a broadcast of *Saving Private Ryan* and (I'm not making this up) NBC coverage of the Athens Olympic Games, in which actors in bodysuits depicted nude classical statues. The commission has dismissed some; for example, a CBS *Early Show* puff piece about *Survivor: Vanuatu* that used the word "bullshitter" was OK because it was part of a "bona fide news interview."

This kind of judgment is part of the problem. Legal scholar Thomas Emerson noted that "the function of the censor is to censor. He has a professional interest in finding things to suppress." Official judgments about "bona fide" news threaten important speech. Rupert Murdoch can fight for his celebrities' right to swear (in fact, Murdoch recently announced that Fox would refuse to pay a new round of fines, for pixelated nudity during the forgettable reality series *Married by America*). But local broadcasters—including public radio and TV—can't afford to battle the prudes, and thus self-censorship is already under way nationwide. (Popular commentator Sandra Tsing Loh was purged by public radio station KCRW when an engineer forgot to bleep "fuck" out of a commentary.)

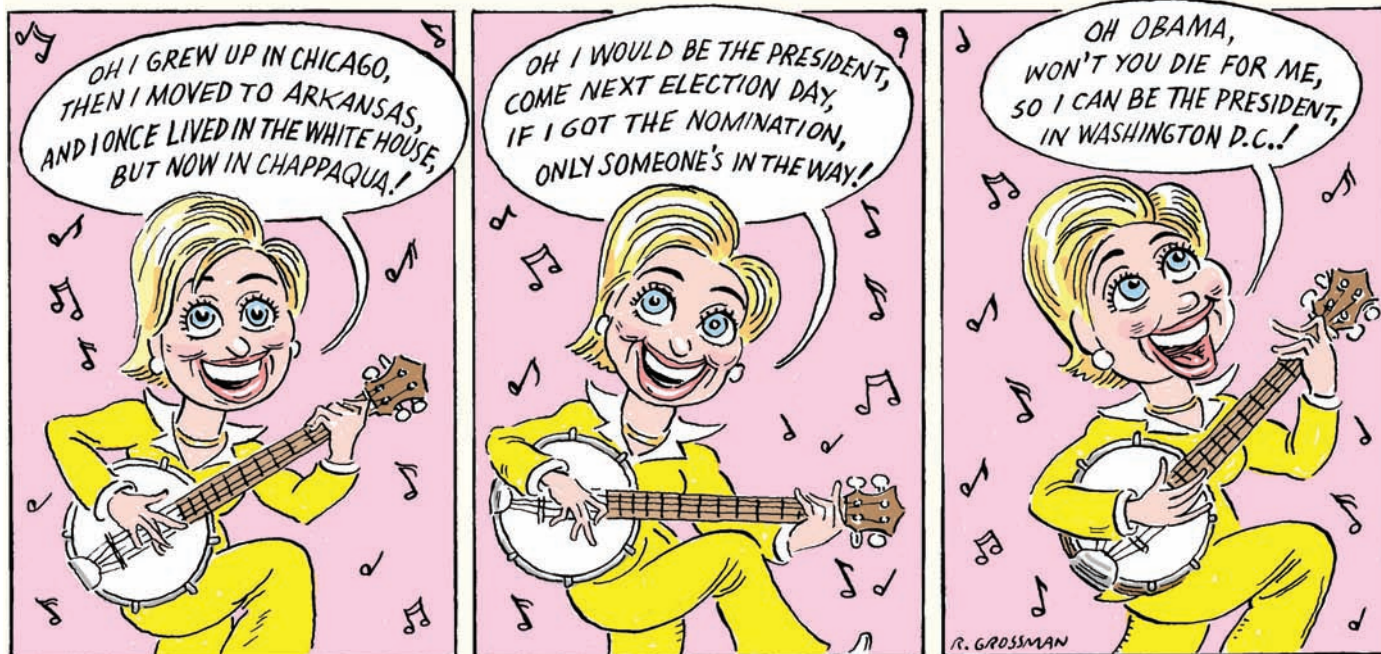
Censorship is the real "C-word." Will the Roberts Court now empower the "grammatically squeamish" to dictate what the rest of us can watch?

GARRETT EPPS

Garrett Epps, who teaches constitutional law at the University of Oregon, will move to the University of Baltimore next fall. His most recent book is Democracy Reborn: The Fourteenth Amendment and the Fight for Equal Rights in Post-Civil War America.

Comix Nation

by ROBERT GROSSMAN



Patricia J. Williams

Character Assassinations

Former White House press secretary Scott McClellan has published an unsettling book dissecting what he considers the most serious failing of the Bush presidency: “a decision to turn away from candor and honesty when those qualities were most needed.” Ranging from the invasion of Iraq to the retributive outing of Valerie Plame as a CIA agent, McClellan’s revelatory memoir is the most scathing indictment yet from a member of Bush’s inner circle. “The top White House officials who knew the truth—including Rove, Libby, and possibly Vice President Cheney—allowed me, even encouraged me, to repeat a lie.”

The repetition of lies as a Republican strategy is not a surprise, of course. There is a purposefulness with which outright fictions have flowed from the right’s propaganda mills. Obama is a Muslim. Hillary is a lesbian. And before McCain kissed and made up with the Rovian cohort, he reportedly fathered a daughter with a black prostitute.

What’s more intriguing is why the persistent fraudulence of the Republican machine remains so widely known yet so widely ignored. Bush’s obvious corruption has hardly diminished the ongoing power of the expert liars who continue to pump dirt into the drinking water of our democracy. Karl Rove, Richard Viguerie, Ralph Reed and Jesse Helms are all busily at work behind the scenes. We know this and yet the purchase—even among liberals—of Willie Horton-ized, xenophobic images is astonishing. If it’s not entirely surprising to see George “macaca” Allen standing behind McCain at every event, it’s more disturbing to hear Yale alumna Hillary Clinton deploy the term “elitist” against Barack Obama, in exactly the way Republicans deployed “liberal” as an insult against her.

Why do these bald manipulations work so well? Perhaps denial is a comfortable form of hypocrisy; but perhaps, too, the truth is more broadly indicting than the lies. Years ago I wrote about the case of a man who robbed a bank and was running down the street with the loot when he in turn was mugged by a second robber, who took the money and fled. The first robber went to the police and reported the mugging with great and sober indignation. Here’s what made the story less than funny: the first robber was white, innocently robbing his neighborhood bank. The second robber was black. The first robber seemed to have found that “invasion” of his neighborhood a greater indignity than even his self-interest could tolerate.

It feels as though this impulse is at work in voters who say they’d vote for Clinton, but if she doesn’t get the nomination, then for McCain rather than Obama. What would drive someone who endorses Clinton’s policies to reject so completely Obama, whose politics are so close to hers? What would make them embrace McCain, a man pledged to the Administration that has so incontestably burdened us with bankruptcy and eternal war? The explanations vary: They may not “like McCain,” but they “trust” him. They don’t “hate” Obama, but they don’t

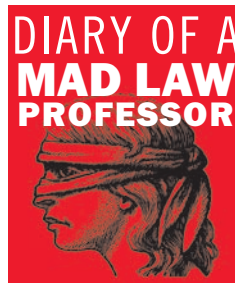
“know” him well enough to vote for him. I worry about this oft reiterated investment in “not knowing” Obama, a persistent commitment to his remaining strange and unfamiliar. It seems to trump all else—the economy, the war, Republican incompetence, the lies. Highway robbery isn’t nearly so great a crime as a person of color who transgresses his race-specific “place.”

Segregation by geographic place is, of course, a large part of the dynamic at work. But the unfamiliarity and distrust is not just the product of physical space. It is also a well-cultivated conceptual wall, designed to ignite personal insecurities and identity politics at the most insidious level. As Republican strategist Roger Stone said to *The New Yorker*, “Are you black? Are you Hispanic? Are you gay? [If not,] then why the fuck are you a Democrat? You should be with us.” There’s an accusative, mocking condescension in that “you.” It taunts with the damnation of outsider status. Join “Us.” We are white. We are nativist. We are

heterosexual. This barely concealed appeal to homophobic white manliness is often disguised as strength of character, a bragging point, a seductively militaristic model of duck hunting, fatherhood and testosterone. Being nerdy or wussy is a “Democrat thing.” This is an appeal to affect, not issues, to Rambo rather than reality.

Yet there is violence at the core of these images, and recently many seem to be brimming with a Freudian muddle of assassination fantasies. In an op-ed in the *New York Times*, Edward Luttwak suggested that because Obama’s father was a Muslim, he risked being assassinated as a traitor to Islam for having embraced Christianity. The *Times*’s appalling decision to publish this patently false proposition provoked widespread and outraged response from religious leaders of all faiths. Similarly, Clinton has apologized for saying that she’s hanging on in the race because lots can still happen—after all, Robert Kennedy was assassinated in June. That this sounded like a crude version of “hope springs eternal,” I will leave psychiatrists to sort out. Less enigmatic was the statement by Fox’s Linda Trotta, who confused Osama with Obama and then airily concluded that somebody should “knock off...both if we could.”

Contrary to “little guy,” “populist” explanations, I think it is the prerogative of the very entrenched upper classes to orchestrate this nasty mockery—a mockery not just of all those who presume to rise above their station but also of all those who fail to accommodate their misery by working hard, and ever harder. The outcome of this election has less to do with how many boilermakers Clinton can toss back or how poorly Obama bowls. I believe it will require our excavating resurgent caricatures of both of them as Reconstruction-era “carpetbaggers”; our resisting the irrational Nixonian hatred of well-educated people; and most important, of bringing to an immediate halt the casually jocular, seemingly thoughtless and inexcusably dangerous call to smack down the few genuine icons of American mobility we have, who dare exceed their assigned place in the order of things by aspiring to share the power. ■



Eric Alterman

Say It Ain't So, Joe

In my last column, I wrote of the recent right-wing infatuation with Hillary Clinton, dubbed “the Lieberman of the Democratic party” by *National Review*’s Rich Lowry. Now let’s take a look at the qualities in Lieberman himself that our pundits so admire.

Though he ran as an “independent Democrat” and bragged of his deep connection to traditional Democratic interest groups, Lieberman has finally come out of his private closet as a right-wing Republican, not merely endorsing John McCain for President but embracing virtually every accusation against Barack Obama that Republican operatives can manufacture.

Roll the clock back to 2006, when the punditocracy saw apocalypse in Lieberman’s impending primary defeat. Pundit “dean” David Broder bemoaned the “terrible tug” of a Ned Lamont victory. *Slate*’s Jacob Weisberg complained that “the 2006 Connecticut primary points to the growing influence within the party of leftists unmoved by the fight against global jihad.” Martin Peretz denounced the “thought-enforcers of the left,” and Lanny Davis detected evidence of “liberal McCarthyism.” These were polite ripostes compared with those heard on cable news, however, where CNN anchor Chuck Roberts termed Lamont “the Al Qaeda candidate” (before apologizing) and Fox’s John Gibson explained, “The Khmer Rouge wing of the Democratic Party is making a bid for a complete takeover.” And yet even these comments somehow paled in comparison with the complaints of *The New Republic*’s Jonathan Chait, who decried the “pack of crazed, ignorant ideological cannibals”—a description he attributed to “Lieberman’s Allies”—“fanatics” operating on the basis of a “paranoid, Manichean worldview brimming with humorless rage”—a characterization he embraced as his own.

Lieberman’s blinkered critique of the Democrats—offered in a speech at a dinner for *Commentary* magazine and published in op-ed form in the *Wall Street Journal*—is a stale, forty-year-old whine that could have been written by any member of the extended Kristol/Podhoretz *mishpocheh* with nary a comma moved. More emotive than historical, it oversimplifies and mischaracterizes the past fifty years of US foreign policy to a degree that might have impressed Soviet ideologist Mikhail Suslov. Lieberman, for instance, seems not to know that Franklin Roosevelt allied himself with the Soviet Union, or that John F. Kennedy never committed to full-scale war in Vietnam. Meanwhile, he complains, Obama has “embraced our worst enemies.”

What is perhaps strangest about Lieberman’s antiliberal jihad is that the very changes he professes to detest in Democrats were once embodied in one Joe Lieberman. While Tailgunner Joe identifies the 1970s as the period his party went off the rails, he does not mention that he himself was a founding member of the leftist Caucus of Connecticut Democrats, as well as a diehard supporter of the Rev. Joe Duffey’s 1970 primary challenge to hawkish Democratic Senator Thomas Dodd. A Vietnam draft-

evader, Lieberman won his State Senate seat in 1970 on an anti-war platform. Perhaps more shocking, as Joe Conason noted in *Salon*, is the fact that the same year he published a book of cold war history titled *The Scorpion and the Tarantula* that neocon Ira Stoll derided as a “masterpiece of moral equivalency.”

Wait—it gets better. At a time when many Lieberman supporters worry incessantly about the rise of anti-Semitism they perceive in American political life, Lieberman—acting undoubtedly out of cravenness rather than ideological sympathy—has lent aid and comfort to some egregious anti-Semites. Not only has he proved an energetic apologist for the Rev. John Hagee—a man who thinks Hitler was a “hunter” sent by God “to get [the Jews] to come back to the land of Israel”—he is scheduled to give the keynote address at Christians United for Israel’s “Washington–Israel Summit” in July. And during the 2000 election, he even championed the cause of Louis Farrakhan, who believes Hitler to have been a “great man” and Judaism a “gutter religion.” True, Lieberman averred, “Minister Farrakhan said a few things earlier...that were just not informed.” But even so, he continued to “have respect for him,” and wished to meet with him.

Lieberman’s skills as a military analyst are of a piece with his talent as a historian. For instance, during the 2006 campaign, he pronounced himself “confident” that the United States would be able to reduce its military presence by more than 50 percent by the end of 2007. Instead, of course, the troop numbers increased with the “surge”—an escalation he has championed—and remains higher than at the moment he made his confident prediction.

So how is it that this dove-turned-hawk, Democrat-turned-Republican apologist for anti-Semitism has become the hero of the Kristol/Podhoretz/*Commentary*/*Wall Street Journal*/*Weekly Standard*/*New Republic*/*Slate* neocon/liberal hawk crowd? Perhaps the answer is that Lieberman’s erstwhile champions never really paid much attention to what he said. What they cherished in Lieberman was not his intelligence or his integrity but his enemies: the liberals, whether of the Al Qaeda, Khmer Rouge or cannibalistic variety.

The Nixonian stoking of hatred toward liberals (and often minorities as well) has become a staple of conservative campaigns and their MSM cheerleaders. Explaining his support for Bush’s invasion of Iraq, Andrew Sullivan, who has since raised the specter of war crimes trials for his former heroes, says he associated opposition to the war “with the far left...and was revolted by the anti-war marches I saw in Washington. I became much too concerned with fighting that old internal ideological battle.” His confession echoed that of another fan of Joe McCarthy, Irving Kristol, who wrote in 1993: “So far from having ended, my cold war has increased in intensity, as sector after sector of American life has been ruthlessly corrupted by the liberal ethos.... Now that the other ‘Cold War’ is over, the real cold war has begun.” The more things change... ■





The media reform movement has made a few inroads—but there's still a long way to go.

by **ROBERT McCHESNEY** and **JOHN NICHOLS**

On a Thursday in mid-May, the Senate did something that would have been unimaginable a decade ago. Led by Democrat Byron Dorgan, the senators—Democrats and Republicans, liberals and conservatives—gave Rupert Murdoch and his fellow media moguls the sort of slap that masters of the universe don't expect from mere mortals on Capitol Hill. With a voice vote that confirmed the near-unanimous sentiment of senators who had heard from hundreds of thousands of Americans demanding that they act, the legislators moved to nullify an FCC attempt to permit a radical form of media consolidation: a rule change designed to permit one corporation to own daily and weekly newspapers as well as television and radio stations in the same local market. The removal of the historic bar to newspaper-broadcast cross-ownership has long been a top priority of Big Media. They want to dramatically increase revenues by buying up major media properties in American cities, shutting down competing newsrooms and creating a one-size-fits-all local discourse that's great for the bottom line but lousy for the communities they are supposed to serve and a nightmare for democracy.

That's just some of the good news at a time when the media policy debate has been redefined by the emergence of a muscular grassroots reform movement. Bush Administration schemes to use federal dollars to subsidize friendly journalists and illegally push its propaganda as legitimate news have been exposed and halted, with the House approving a defense appropriations amendment that outlaws any "concerted effort to propagandize" by the Pentagon. Public broadcasting, community broadcasting and cable access channels have withstood assault from corporate interlopers, fundamentalist censors and the GOP Congressional allies they share in common. And against a full-frontal attack from two industries, telephone and cable—whose entire business model is based on lobbying

Congress and regulators to get monopoly privileges—a grassroots movement has preserved network neutrality, the first amendment of the digital epoch, which holds that Internet service providers shall not censor or discriminate against particular websites or services. So successful has this challenge to the telecom lobbies been that the House may soon endorse the Internet Freedom Preservation Act.

But while the picture has improved, especially compared with just a few years ago, the news is not nearly good enough. The Senate's resolution of disapproval did not reverse the FCC's cross-ownership rule change. It merely began a pushback that still requires a House vote—and even if it passes Congress, it will then encounter a veto by George W. Bush. Likewise, while public and community media have been spared from the executioner, they still face deep-seated funding and competitive disadvantages that require structural reforms, not Band-Aids.

The media reform movement must prepare now to promote a wide range of structural reforms—to talk of changing media for the better rather than merely preventing it from getting worse. "Media reform" has become a catch-all phrase to describe the broad goals of a movement that says consolidated ownership of broadcast and cable media, chain ownership of newspapers, and telephone and cable-company colonization of the Internet pose a threat not just to the culture of the Republic but to democracy itself. The movement that became a force to be reckoned with during the Bush years had to fight defensive actions with the purpose of preventing more consolidation, more homogenization and more manipulation of information by elites. Now, however, we must require corporations that reap immense profits from the people's airwaves to meet high public-service standards, dust off rusty but still functional antitrust laws to break up TV and radio conglomerates, address over-the-top commercialization of our culture and establish a

heterogeneous and accountable noncommercial media sector. In sum, we need to establish rules and structures designed to create a cultural environment that will enlighten, empower and energize citizens so they can realize the full promise of an American experiment that has, since its founding, relied on freedom of the press to rest authority in the people.

Despite all the revelations exposing government assaults on a free press, too many media outlets continue to tell the politically and economically powerful, "Lie to me!" Five years into a war made possible by the persistent refusal of the major media to distinguish fact from Bush Administration spin, we learned this spring about the Pentagon's PR machine's multimillion-dollar propaganda campaign that seeded willing broadcast and cable news programs with "expert" generals who parroted the White House line right up to the point at which the fraud was exposed. Even after the *New York Times* broke the story, the networks still chose to cover their shame rather than expose a war that has gone far worse than most Americans know.

Recently we have seen an acceleration of the collapse of journalistic standards. Veteran reporters like Walter Cronkite are appalled by the mergermania that has swept the industry, diluting standards, dumbing down the news and gutting newsrooms. Rapid consolidation, evidenced most recently by the breakup of the once-venerable Knight-Ridder newspapers, the

There is a clear difference between both the rhetoric and records of John McCain and Barack Obama on media issues.

sale of the Tribune Company and its media properties and the swallowing of the *Wall Street Journal* by Murdoch's News Corp continues the steady replacement of civic and democratic values by commercial and entertainment priorities. But responsible journalists have less and less to say about newsroom agendas these days. The calls are being made by consultants and bean counters, who increasingly rely on official sources and talking-head pundits rather than newsgathering or serious debate.

The crisis is widespread, and it affects not just our policies but the politics that might improve them. There are two critical issues on which a free press must be skeptical of official statements, challenging to the powerful and rigorous in the search for truth. One of them is war—and in the case of the post-9/11 wars, our media have failed us miserably. (Even former White House press secretary Scott McClellan now acknowledges that the media were "complicit enablers" in the run-up to the Iraq invasion). The other issue is elections, when voters rely on media to provide them with what candidates, parties and interest groups often will not: a serious focus on issues that matter and on the responses of candidates to those issues. Instead,

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when the Democratic race was reaching its penultimate stage, the dominant story was a ridiculously overplayed discussion about Barack Obama's former minister. Before the critical Pennsylvania primary, studies show, the provocative Rev. Jeremiah Wright got more coverage than Obama's rival for the nomination, Hillary Clinton. And forget about issues—the most covered policy debate of the period, a ginned-up argument about whether to slash gas taxes for the summer, garnered only one-sixth as much attention as Wright.

Viable democracy cannot survive, let alone flourish, with such debased journalistic standards. Despite some remarkable recent victories by grassroots activists, our media still fail the most critical tests of a free press. This is an impasse that cannot last for long, and in all likelihood the outcome of the 2008 presidential election will go a long way toward determining which side, the corporate owners or the public, will win the battle for the media. The stakes could not be higher.

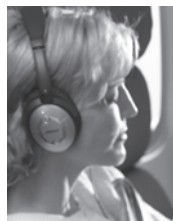
The next President will make two important decisions. The first will be whether to accept media reform legislation or veto it. There is little doubt that Congress has shifted dramatically as a result of popular pressure. Corporate lobbyists who used to worry only about battling one another for the largest slice of the pie know the game has changed. The 2008 elections will almost certainly increase support in both houses and from both parties for media reform.

Second, the next President will appoint a new FCC chair who will command a majority of the commission's five members. This is a critical choice. The right majority would embrace the values and ideals of the thousands of media critics, independent media producers and democracy activists who will gather June 6–8 in Minneapolis for the fourth National Conference for Media Reform. Dissident commissioners Michael Copps and Jonathan Adelstein, who have battled the FCC's pro-Big Media majority on issues ranging from media ownership to net neutrality and corporate manipulation of the news over the past four years, will both address the conference. If Copps, the senior of the two, is named chair, this savvy Washington veteran is prepared to turn the agency into what it was intended to be by Copps's hero, Franklin Roosevelt: a muscular defender of the public interest with the research capacity and the authority to assure that the airwaves and broadband spectrum, which are owned by the people, actually respond to popular demand for diversity, competition and local control. After years of battling to block rule changes pushed by corporate lobbyists, Copps has called for a New American Media Contract, saying, "I'm sick of playing defense." In these pages on April 7, he urged that we "reinvigorate the license-renewal process" by returning to standards set during Roosevelt's presidency, when "renewals were required every three years, and a station's public-interest record was subject to FCC judgment."

Don't look for a President John McCain to hand Copps the chairmanship. There is a clear difference between McCain and Obama when it comes to what the candidates say about media issues, and an even clearer difference in their records. Although

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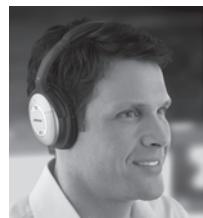
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many GOP voters, and some back-benchers in Congress, are supportive of media reform, the commanding heights of the party are a wholly owned subsidiary of the media giants. On the surface McCain may appear to be a complex figure who straddles the fence. In the increasingly distant past he occasionally tossed out a soundbite recognizing citizen concerns. But in recent years he has invariably championed the corporate lobbies. McCain's free-market rhetoric about government-created and indirectly subsidized media monopolies is increasingly recognized for what it is: propaganda to advance the policy objectives of massive corporations.

More than a decade ago McCain voted against the Telecommunications Act of 1996, which gave the green light to media consolidation. He also loudly opposed the efforts of commercial broadcasters to quash low-power noncommercial FM broadcasting in 2000. Progressives applauded in both cases. But as chair of the all-important Senate Commerce Committee, which was responsible for implementation of the Telecom Act, the Arizona senator resisted numerous opportunities to mitigate its worst excesses. The hallmarks of McCain's "leadership" have been: (1) a failure to promote the public interest; (2) hypocritical pro-consumer rhetoric that hides pro-business action; (3) a fundamental misunderstanding of technology and economics; and (4) troubling, at times scandalous, loyalty to particular special interests.

While most of the attention to February's *New York Times* investigation of McCain's relationship with Vicki Iseman focused on speculation about romantic entanglement, shockingly little attention was paid to the revelation that in 1999 McCain had, as Commerce Committee chair, pressured the FCC to issue a critical TV station license to Paxson Communications, for whom Iseman was lobbying. McCain's approach was so aggressive and so out of bounds even for corporate-cozy Washington that then-FCC chair William Kennard complained about the senator's attempted intervention. Paxson's executives and lobbyists contributed more than \$20,000 to McCain's 2000 presidential campaign, and its CEO lent McCain the company's jet at least four times for campaign travel. The senator's symbiotic relationship with Paxson and telecom giants like AT&T is rarely mentioned on the Straight Talk Express.

Also unmentioned is the crucial role McCain played in shaping the Bush-era FCC. It was McCain who personally and aggressively promoted Michael Powell to serve as FCC chair, and who defended Powell's attempts in 2003 to rewrite media ownership rules according to a script written by industry lobbyists. While other senators objected to those rule changes after more than 2 million Americans communicated their opposition, McCain sought to preserve them. And he remains joined at the hip with Powell, who unabashedly thinks the job of government is to promote the interests of the largest communication firms. In May Powell represented the McCain campaign on a panel discussion at the annual conference of the National Cable & Telecommunications Association.

It is unlikely that McCain would reappoint the disgraced Powell as chair. But it is reasonably certain he would appoint someone who shares Powell's deafness to the pleadings of public interest. The senator's 2006 vote against maintaining net neutrality suggests that his commitment to the business objectives of AT&T outweigh any commitment to the public interest.

Straight-talk soundbites notwithstanding, McCain will be a reactionary force on media issues across the board.

Barack Obama is different. Obama's campaign has produced the most comprehensive, public-interest-oriented media agenda ever advanced by a major presidential candidate. Like Hillary Clinton, the Illinois senator has been an outspoken defender of net neutrality. The Obama camp's position paper on media issues echoes Copps when it says that as President, he "would encourage diversity in the ownership of broadcast media, promote the development of new media outlets for expression of diverse viewpoints, and clarify the public interest obligations of broadcasters who occupy the nation's spectrum." In a recent speech Obama called for strengthened antitrust enforcement, specifically warning against media consolidation. An Obama presidency would, he and his supporters say, use all the tools of government to promote greater coverage of local issues and better responsiveness by broadcasters to the communities they serve. Like Copps, Obama favors investment to connect remote and disenfranchised communities to the Internet and to make public broadcasting a more robust voice in the national discourse.

While a President Obama would almost certainly be different from a President McCain on media issues, the extent of the difference remains open to debate. Would Obama actually make Copps or someone like him FCC chair? Would Obama move immediately and effectively to break the stranglehold of media lobbyists? That is by no means certain. While his stated policies are encouraging, competing forces are struggling to influence the candidate. Industry money is going to Obama in anticipation of his victory. He is a self-styled party centrist, and in recent Democratic Party history, "centrism" has usually meant putting the demands of moneyed interests ahead of those of rank-and-file citizens. The good news is that many of Obama's younger advisers are products of the media reform movement or have been influenced by it. The bad news is that others, like Clinton-era FCC chair Kennard, have records of compromising with the telecom industry. So while some Big Media will be betting on McCain, they won't give up easily on Obama.

What Obama's candidacy offers, then, is an opening and—if we dare employ an overused word from this campaign season—a measure of hope. The proper response to that opening is not celebration but vigilance and determination. Obama's positions, while sometimes vague, do allow us to imagine securing increased funding for public and community broadcasting, a broadband build-out that allows all Americans to realize the promise of the Internet, and a new approach to the licensing and regulation of the people's airwaves that respects the public interest more than Rupert Murdoch's bottom line. We can anticipate the development of creative policies to promote and protect viable independent journalism and local media. The right President will make achieving all these ends easier. The right Congress will make the task easier still. But above all, we will need the right media reform movement—one that is aggressive in its demands regardless of who sits in the White House, savvy in its approach to the FCC and Congressional committees, bipartisan and determined to build broad coalitions, and focused not just on playing defense but on shaping popular media for the twenty-first century. ■

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David M. Bressoud is the DeWitt Wallace Professor of Mathematics in the Department of Mathematics and Computer Science at Macalester College, where he has also served as Chair of the department. He earned his Master's and Ph.D. in Mathematics from Temple University.

A former Fulbright Fellow and Sloan Foundation Fellow, Professor Bressoud has served as Visiting Professor at the Institute for Advanced Study and the Mathematical Association of America's Pólya Lecturer, and has received the Mathematical Association of America's Allegheny Mountain Section Distinguished Teaching Award.

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Labor's Growing Pains

SEIU battles the California Nurses—and dissidents within its own ranks.

by ESTHER KAPLAN

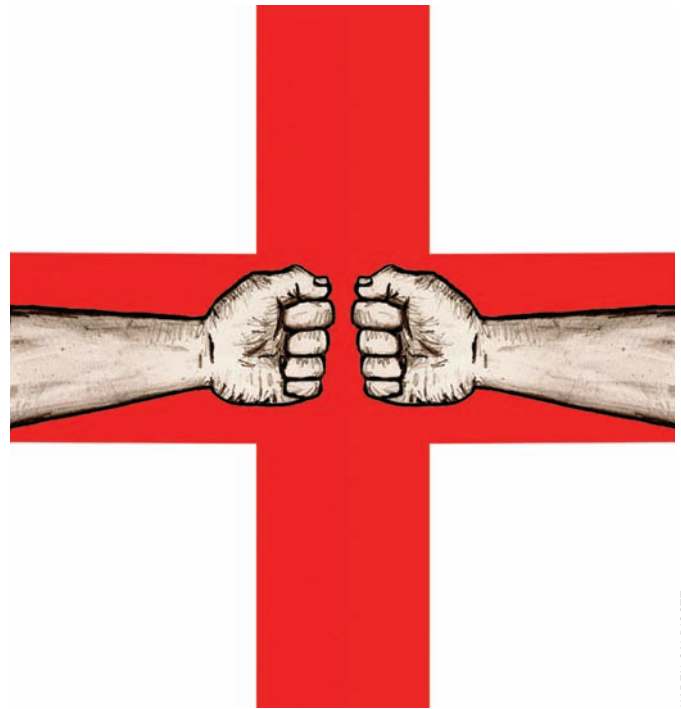
The biggest union feud since the AFL-CIO split three years ago, some would say, began in Ohio. The way Dave Regan tells it, the Service Employees union (SEIU) first began its effort to organize Catholic hospitals there in the small city of Lorain, just west of Cleveland, in 1999. Regan is president of a union that spans Ohio, Kentucky and West Virginia, one of SEIU's newly merged megalocals at the heart of the international union's ambitious plans for turning around labor's decline. The 500 or so nurses at the facility faced, he recalls, a "classic, textbook, very intense, very nasty election environment." The hospital hired anti-union consultants and campaigned aggressively against unionization, pulling in nurses for mandatory staff meetings, as well as for intimidating one-on-ones with their supervisors. According to one organizer, nuns serving as hospital administrators even hinted to the nurses that voting union was a sin.

It was a typical kind of hardball, really—the mix of inside arm-twisting and outside unionbusting expertise that marks four out of every five union votes in this country. Though such campaigns always begin with majority interest, only half result in a union victory, as Regan knows from trying to win traditional labor board elections, shop by shop, for eighteen years in places like eastern Kentucky and West Virginia. "It's incredibly difficult work," he says.

In Lorain, the nurses did vote in the union, by a slim, sixteen-vote margin—and then, also typically, faced a thirteen-month battle to win their first contract. Along the way, the nurses called two daylong strikes to block the hospital's demand for an open shop; each time, management punished the strikers with four-day suspensions. Through contract fights in subsequent years, Regan says, "we struggled and fought and built an organization that our members there are very proud of"; one nurse, galvanized by the experience, went on to become a state senator.

The hospital in Lorain is part of a Catholic chain that is the largest hospital system in the state. In many places, in the wake of steel mill closures, these hospitals have become the biggest employer in town. "So we started to think about the system as a whole," says Regan, "and we decided to create a campaign the object of which was to secure the right for Catholic Healthcare Partners (CHP) workers, across the system, to be able to vote on whether to join the union without going through the intense, negative conditions that existed in 1999." What they sought was "employer neutrality," the brass ring of today's large-scale union organizing campaigns, which use corporate campaigns to pressure employers not to fight unionization drives.

Esther Kaplan is investigative editor at The Nation Institute. To view the key documents discussed in this story, go to thenation.com.



KAREN CALDICOTT

By 2004, CHP workers in Springfield, west of Columbus, anxious over a recent merger, were eager to unionize. But the Lorain experience was a bruiser, and another union had run an election at one of the merged facilities and lost badly. Joyce Moscato, who would soon head the statewide campaign for SEIU, urged caution. She met with the workers and talked about what it would take to win fair organizing rules across the state. "They got it," Moscato recalls. "They understood that they could be the leaders in this fight, and they likened it to the civil rights movement." By spring 2005, workers from Catholic hospitals in Youngstown, Toledo, Cincinnati and Lorain sat down with the Springfield workers to craft a statewide campaign for employer neutrality. A hundred of them, from sixteen hospitals, showed up at CHP headquarters to present their demand. They weren't even allowed inside.

What followed was a three-year corporate campaign. SEIU activists mailed out literature about fair unionization rules to elected officials, clergy and advocacy groups. They had hearings before the state legislature. They got community members and hospital workers to sign open letters, held protests over layoffs and wage-and-hour violations, and met with priests and bishops. They issued reports criticizing the chain for inadequate charity care and bloated CEO pay. One former organizer on the campaign, Jim Straub, who recalls living for months in a charmless hotel in Youngstown in 2005, says, "What made this corporate campaign really cool was, we actually organized committees in every damn hospital in the system."

The culmination of this effort was an election slated to take place in mid-March at nine of the system's twenty-one Ohio hospitals, with the possibility that up to 8,300 workers would unionize in the span of a week. The union's public

pressure had produced an agreement with CHP for a vote “free from coercion.” The employees were informed of the election two weeks in advance by means of a civilized letter, cosigned by CHP and SEIU, a jointly written fact sheet and a broadside from each party arguing, in language so dull as to scarcely be persuasive, *for* (SEIU) and *against* (CHP) the union. Each side set up a toll-free number for questions, and that was that. Neither side would say a word to the workers until after election day. SEIU had taken the concept of neutrality to a whole new level, applying it to the union as well. And the stakes were high. As CHP spokesman Orest Holubec says, if the election had gone smoothly, “it stands to reason that we’d continue the process in other regions.”

Enter the California Nurses, dozens of whom arrived in Ohio clad in scrubs and armed with anti-SEIU propaganda. What was to Regan an “enormous breakthrough” was, to the famously militant nurses union, a disturbing development in what they’ve come to see as SEIU’s corporate-friendly unionism, whose apotheosis was SEIU president Andy Stern’s joint press conference last year with Wal-Mart on healthcare reform.

Ohio will go down in labor history as the place where two of the nation’s most ambitious, visionary, fastest-growing unions declared war.

The fliers the nurses spent three days handing out in front of the Ohio hospitals asked, DEMOCRACY OR DICTATORSHIP? and called the upcoming vote a “back room deal” by the hospital to force nurses into a “sweetheart’ union.”

“In this environment, it was like setting off a bomb,” says Regan. “In a traditional campaign, where both sides are attacking each other, we prepare workers for months for what they’ll hear so they can put it in context. But in this case, we never prepared anyone.” And because of the neutrality deal, SEIU couldn’t say a word in response. Within days, the vote was called off, suspended indefinitely. Talk with anyone at SEIU who was involved, and the rage is palpable. Ohio will go down in labor history as the place where two of the nation’s most ambitious, visionary, fastest-growing unions declared war.

What does that war feel like, two months later? When tens of thousands of California Nurses Association (CNA) members opened their mailboxes in recent weeks, they received a glossy black-and-orange mailer, featuring somber-looking women in scrubs, that accused their union of “burning through members’ hard-earned dues money” carpetbagging across America doing “questionable” deeds. Its slogan: “Hurting nurses. Wasting money. That’s the shame of CNA.” Another compares CNA director Rose Ann DeMoro to a “union-busting executive.” Soon thereafter, CNA’s newsletter arrived, in riposte. Its cover story, *THE NEW DANGER*, featured an image of a purple vial of poison with a skull and crossbones on it, labeled SEIU.

Each side has launched a propaganda website—SEIU Watch, with its slogan “Serving Employers Instead of Us,” and the straightforwardly named Shame on CNA—and each side is ratcheting up the attacks. In recent months, CNA filed a petition to replace SEIU in representing nurses at three Catholic

hospitals in Las Vegas; SEIU then sought to decertify a nurses’ union at a hospital in New York. SEIU activists—including rank-and-filers bused in from Ohio, spoiling for a fight—stormed a *Labor Notes* conference in Detroit to disrupt CNA speakers, sparking a melee and a wave of negative press. And SEIU staffers have followed CNA leaders to their workplaces and homes, peeking through windows, knocking on doors and shouting epithets.

SEIU’s battle cry is revenge for Ohio, where, leaders believe, the nurses robbed thousands of their right to representation. But it’s impossible to understand why CNA would risk such venom without going much further back, to the legislative battles in California that gave the union a national profile—battles in which SEIU seemed always to be on the other side of the barricades, becoming, in CNA’s estimation, “the single greatest barrier” to healthcare reform.

California Clashes

Rose Ann DeMoro, the feisty head of the California Nurses who was dubbed by one advocate “Mother Teresa in brass knuckles,” was once on the outs with her own union. The association, dominated in the early ’90s by management-friendly nurse executives who imagined CNA as a professional society, experienced a revolt by direct-care nurses. They took over the leadership, disaffiliated with the American Nurses Association, installed DeMoro as director, barred nurse administrators from top leadership positions and decided to act like a labor union. The new CNA, with its council of four presidents, all of whom still spend half their workweek at patients’ bedsides, began a grassroots campaign to address the crisis facing their members as managed care took hold across the country: a reckless escalation in the number of patients under each nurse’s care to the point, says president Geri Jenkins, “where you’d have to walk home every day asking, Did I kill somebody today?” They’d solve this first by trying to mandate safe caps on patient-to-nurse ratios; then by mobilizing nurses to win national healthcare.

Using their foot soldiers in scrubs, the union gathered enough signatures for a state ballot initiative, which went down in defeat in 1996. They pushed a bill through the State Legislature, only to see it vetoed by Governor Pete Wilson, a Republican, in 1998. Then, after working to defeat any candidate who wouldn’t support the ratio and staging one of the biggest demonstrations Sacramento had seen since the 1970s, the nurses got their bill signed by Democratic Governor Gray Davis. The new patient-to-nurse caps were set to phase in just as Arnold Schwarzenegger took office; he issued an emergency order to block them. The latex gloves came off: the union hired airplanes to fly messages over his parties and fundraisers; they dogged him at every public appearance; and when he bragged that he was “kicking their butts,” they turned it into a media event. The army of nurses had punctured the movie icon’s aura of invincibility, and as their campaign wore on, his approval rating dropped thirty points. In the end they won implementation of the first patient-to-nurse ratio cap in the country, and California hospitals were transformed. “That law really struck a chord,” says Jenkins, who recalls nurses calling in from all

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But the whole time this battle was unfolding, CNA’s public policy director, Michael Lighty, recalls, SEIU was putting on the brakes. As the nurses pushed their legislation, SEIU introduced a weaker measure on “safe staffing” and fought to allow less-trained staff to count in CNA’s ratios. As CNA was leading RN strikes at Kaiser Permanente, the state’s healthcare behemoth, over plans to replace nurses with unskilled workers, SEIU reached a labor-management partnership that allowed for unskilled “service partners” and “care partners” to replace RNs at the bedside—which led, by CNA’s count, to some 1,800 nurse layoffs—and SEIU members crossed CNA’s picket line. When, in the fall of 2006, CNA and a statewide coalition of consumer advocates were organizing tens of thousands of letters to Sacramento, leafleting at *Sicko* screenings and holding demonstrations in 300 cities to support a single-payer bill, Schwarzenegger sought to commandeer the issue, convening a summit declaring 2007 the Year of Healthcare Reform. CNA and other unions set up a picket line outside

agrees. “We are a genuine social union. We believe the interests of our members and the public interest are identical. Nurses have a legal obligation to advocate for their patients; they have an intimate relationship to their patients; they function outside of the profit motive.” SEIU’s Joe Hill-style talk of One Big Healthcare Union is appealing, she says—if that vision were in other hands. “If we had the luxury to create the perfect union, there’d be one big healthcare union intent on protecting and upscaling each job,” she says. “But the healthcare system is collapsing. Nurses have to fight to save their own occupation, which healthcare corporations would deskill in a minute. And Stern advocates a model of letting the employer define the work and organizing the workers as the employer defines them. That’s deadly for RNs, and deadly for patient care.”

Tom Woodruff, an SEIU vice president who once ran the Ohio Local targeted by CNA, isn’t remotely persuaded. “What are we going to do, let CNA come after us with this elitist rap about how there needs to be a nurses-only union? Giving us two choices: give us all your nurses or have this fight? We won’t. We’re not going to unilaterally disarm.”

The whole time CNA’s campaign for far-reaching healthcare reform was unfolding, SEIU was putting on the brakes.

the event; Andy Stern crossed the picket line to join the governor inside.

As the Year of Healthcare Reform unfolded, CNA’s coalition pushed a single-payer bill through both houses in Sacramento; SEIU, heading up a separate coalition that included the California State Labor Federation, argued that single-payer wasn’t politically viable and supported a Massachusetts-style mandate plan instead. Schwarzenegger vetoed both bills anyway. As the Year of Healthcare Reform hit its final month with no resolution in sight, Stern jetted in to work with Schwarzenegger to mold a third, even more compromised bill, which required Californians to buy care but set no caps on rates and no floor for minimum coverage; tucked inside were perks for SEIU, such as money for a trust fund for homecare workers’ health benefits, to be administered by the union. “SEIU played the leading advocacy role and ultimately the lead compromise role on that bill,” says Lighty. “Stern went behind the back of the California State Fed to cut the deal. But it didn’t even pass in the Senate. It lost the backing of labor. It could not withstand the scrutiny. So how is it they can make a political viability argument?”

Stern, looking back, considers it a “tragedy” that the bill didn’t pass, leaving the healthcare system unchanged. “The Schwarzenegger deal was inadequate, but this is politics at its most real. Let the Senate Democrats tell our member at InterCon whose wife died it’s good that we didn’t pass that ‘bad’ bill.”

These days SEIU doesn’t just attack the California Nurses for unionbusting in Ohio; its leaders attack CNA for being an elite craft union, unwilling to leverage the relative privilege of RNs for the good of the entire hospital staff. DeMoro dis-

This battle is at least partly about carving out turf: according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, more than half a million nursing jobs will be created over the next ten years, more than any other single job category, and each union has ambitions to organize all of them. But the divide also reflects real differences in each union’s

philosophy of unionism.

At the heart of Stern’s vision is a drive toward growth, to organize the “90 percent of workers without a union.” Without growth, he argues, any union gains are built on sand—“a higher compensation island in a growing nonunion sea.” This singular focus is rooted in a realization that, given the long slide in union ranks since the 1950s, the labor movement must build a critical mass of members (“density”) in key industries in order to wield power against ever larger and bolder multinational employers. Three years ago, he proposed a radical restructuring of organized labor to accomplish this, and when the AFL-CIO didn’t bite, he bolted to form a rival federation, Change to Win.

Though often painted as an autocrat, Stern has surrounded himself with an impressive brain trust, featuring such heavyweights as Dennis Rivera and Gerald Hudson, who built 1199, the powerful healthcare union in New York, and Stephen Lerner, the architect of Justice for Janitors. Under their leadership, SEIU has organized more than a million new workers, bringing their tally to 1.9 million, and has earned a reputation as a formidable social and political force. The conservative *National Journal* named SEIU’s political operation the most influential in the country, and antiunion law firms now run trainings on how to combat its corporate campaigns.

At the same time, Stern has shocked other labor leaders—and thrilled the mainstream press—with his aggressive corporate partnerships, designed to gain new members and find political common ground. By employing such “radically experimental” tactics (Hudson’s phrase), SEIU’s leaders believe they can build enough power to win everything from national healthcare to immigration reform.

But SEIU isn't the only innovator. CNA is piloting its own experimental model, training nurses as activists—whether or not they can win a union at their job site—and deploying them to fight for nurse/patient ratio bills and single-payer healthcare even in labor-hostile climes like Texas. This model trades heavily on the social clout enjoyed by nurses, and their willingness to do battle with corporations on the public's behalf.

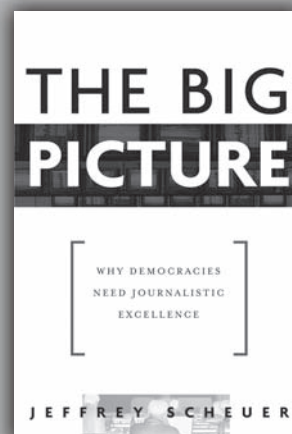
Dissension in the Ranks

While SEIU pours resources into its showdown with the California Nurses, the nation's largest union is also fighting a civil war within its own ranks. This conflict, too, springs from compromises the union has had to make in its monomaniacal focus on growth. It has pitted Stern and his allies against the leader of one of SEIU's largest Locals, the Oakland-based United Healthcare Workers West. UHW president Sal Rosselli, who once supported Stern's reform agenda, is now in open rebellion against what he sees as Stern's growth-at-any-cost strategy, which he believes has produced a "false democracy in SEIU" that leaves real worker power in the dust. Since Rosselli's resignation from SEIU's executive board in February, the 140,000 members of his union have received a barrage of more than half a dozen glossy mailers and long argumentative letters accusing UHW leaders of everything from hypocrisy to illegality.

In April SEIU filed suit against Rosselli's board, accusing it of financial misdeeds, a gesture widely understood as the latest salvo in a plan to put UHW under trusteeship and oust its leaders. UHW and SEIU have traded barbs over alleged fixing of delegate slates to SEIU's quadrennial convention, which opens June 1 in Puerto Rico. In March, SEIU hired a firm to call Rosselli's members with a push poll, implying that UHW had lied on delegate ballots and disrupted contract negotiations. SEIU has deployed dozens of staffers to fight this war, which has gotten so nasty that the union representing them passed a resolution in May opposing any further work to undermine the Local.

The dispute with Rosselli has its origins in a disagreement over one of SEIU's innovative employer-neutrality agreements, which offer concessions in exchange for the ability to organize without interference. The one in question was with Tenet, a national hospital chain, whose facilities SEIU had organized based on a deal that gave up the right to strike or picket for any newly organized workers. When it came time to negotiate a second contract, Tony Aidukas, a rehab specialist at a Tenet facility in Palm Springs, was elected to the bargaining committee. He said the members had high hopes: they wanted to get back the right to picket and strike, to win a say over patient care and an end to subcontracting. But negotiations soon went national, and Aidukas and his team were left to cool their heels outside while staffers from the national union sat down with Tenet. At the time, 22 percent of Tenet was union; SEIU wanted closer to 100 percent. Toward this end, SEIU signed a tentative deal giving Tenet the right to subcontract up to 12 percent of the workforce. When SEIU agreed to wage givebacks and a seven-year extension of the no-strike clause, UHW walked out. "Frankly, I don't think there's much concern for the members' lives in this rush to enlarge SEIU," says Aidukas. "Why join a union that's going to agree to sub-

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Mary Kay Henry, an SEIU vice president who was active in the negotiations, admits that it was probably a mistake to bargain without any workers present. But she still believes a united front would have produced more; in the end the union won the right to organize only one out of five additional Tenet facilities. "That's what's at stake," she says. "Is Sal willing to function as a national union, to use the power of his stronghold to expand workers' power nationally?"

Stephen Lerner, the architect of SEIU's most celebrated campaign, Justice for Janitors, points out that his first janitors' contract in LA was a bitter disappointment. But 200,000 unionized janitors later, the contract inked May 17 includes full family healthcare and \$10.75 an hour. That could never have happened if SEIU Locals "were still these little fiefdoms," he says. "We had ferocious public battles, but we were finally able to get the cities that were already union to use their leverage to win." That, he says, is what the SEIU expects from Sal Rosselli.

In what Stern sees as a classic example of "Just Us" union-

Stern's critics, whatever their narrower motives, have given voice to widely shared concerns about eroding local autonomy within SEIU.

ism, Rosselli worked out a deal with better terms for his members that only covered Tenet's California facilities. But Rosselli is vehement that he was serving national goals: his members accepted healthcare givebacks in order to win the right to criticize Tenet publicly and throw up solidarity pickets—exactly the tools needed to aid SEIU's organizing drives in Florida and beyond. Good contracts now, Rosselli wrote in a letter to Stern, "are the best examples we can use to organize the unorganized." SEIU, he says, has lost sight of that.

Rosselli has raised other issues, too—including one that marks the spot where his story and DeMoro's intersect. During Schwarzenegger's Year of Healthcare Reform, UHW supported a compromise measure. But, Rosselli says, there was a bottom line: it had to be affordable, and it had to clearly define what insurers had to cover. "Then Stern started meeting with the governor without telling anybody," says Rosselli, and worked out a bill that didn't take care of either. "We started pushing back, and he didn't like it." SEIU's state council, which Rosselli headed, was promptly disbanded and replaced by a new executive board that backed the bill. UHW and CNA did not. With Tenet and with healthcare reform, Rosselli says, Stern underestimated what was winnable.

Many leaders in SEIU question the timing of Rosselli's resignation, occurring as it did just weeks after the union's healthcare division issued a report examining whether all long-term-care workers in California should be consolidated under one roof, a move that would likely shrink Rosselli's Local. He is, they say, less concerned with democracy than with preserving his own power. "In a nutshell, it is a turf war," says Tyrone Freeman, president of the Los Angeles-based Local 6434 and a likely candidate to head up a merged nursing home Local.

"What Brother Rosselli advocates for is a philosophy of taking care of himself and his members at the expense of all the healthcare workers in California who don't yet have a union."

Whether or not Rosselli's motives are pure, he has given voice to widely shared concerns about eroding local autonomy within SEIU. These concerns are linked to the way SEIU has implemented its merge-to-win strategy, which seeks to enhance the union's bargaining power by herding smaller Locals into larger institutions. Roxanne Sanchez was, until the 2006 mergers, president of Local 790, which represented public sector workers in the Bay Area. Now she and several other Local presidents are merely rank-and-file members of Local 1021. "Philosophically, politically, I think the merger was a good decision," she says. Her union was a fifteen-minute drive from two other public sector Locals that each maintained separate buildings; they were duplicating efforts and never collaborated. "But the way they handled the mergers was atrocious." Combined, the unions had some fifty officers and 300 board members; SEIU appointed only twenty-five total to a provisional governing board. Then SEIU reassigned the staff and put them all on probation; dozens quit their jobs. "We have to go through the pain of changing how we think," Sanchez says. "But the international was so unreceptive to anything we as rank-and-file people brought to the table. It was the tone and tenor of someone who doesn't have to look back."

Zev Kvitky, president of another merged Local, which represents workers at Stanford and Santa Clara universities, helped, in January, to found a dissident SEIU caucus, SMART, to draw attention to these issues. He says SEIU held formal hearings but failed to communicate with members about the reorganization, as evidenced by the 10 percent voter turnout for the 2006 merger deal. "There was no discussion," he says, "no debate." His other major beef concerns those Tenet-style template contracts. "If you give up the right to free speech," he says, "the right to strike, in return for the right to organize, how do you ever win a contract for those people?"

The Paper Trail

Like mergers, these employer agreements have become a critical part of what Hudson calls the union's "obsessive" drive toward growth. Other unions fight for employer neutrality with a stick; SEIU has taken to using carrots as well, larding deals with corporate enticements. *The Nation* was able to review some of the most controversial of these agreements. Consider a 2002 California nursing home agreement, in which SEIU committed to lobby for tort reform and to restrict union members from reporting suspected abuse or neglect except as required by law. Or that deal with Kaiser from the '90s that so infuriated CNA, which allowed "service partners" to replace RNs at patients' bedsides. Or the 2006 Oregon nursing home deal, which gave the union the right to organize four to six new facilities (operators got the "final unilateral decision" as to which ones) in return for pulling an initiative on safe staffing.

On May 3, student labor activists from four campuses wrote to Stern to express their "deep concern" that these deals may have "actually hurt workers' ability to improve their lives or

even join a union at all.” At the University of North Carolina, for example, SEIU, in collaboration with another union, spearheaded an organizing drive of food service workers on the payroll of Aramark. A campaign of intimidation ensued, one pro-union worker was fired and the campus was roiled by protests. But after summer break, the union organizers mysteriously disappeared. “Workers were asking us what was going on,” recalls one student activist. “We kept calling SEIU. We sent them letters, but we didn’t hear anything.” They were eventually told, without explanation, that the organizers wouldn’t come back. “We learned later about a secret deal they’d cut with Aramark that didn’t include UNC,” she says. “That was such a spectacular failure. We see these workers all the time, and it was really painful.”

UHW members, too, hit an organizing wall thrown up by one of these agreements. After winning the Tenet contract last November, Tony Aidukas’s shop met with housekeepers at his hospital, on the payroll of a Compass subsidiary, about bringing them into the union—only to be told by a UHW staffer that SEIU had cut a national deal agreeing not to organize the Compass workers at his site, at least not for now. “I’ve been unable to find out whether they are on the schedule to get organized,” Aidukas says. “We had to go back and say, Sorry, we can’t help you.”

Andy Stern listens to these stories and concedes, “It sounds like we didn’t do a great job of explaining how we did this.” But as for criticism of the deals themselves, he says simply, “I don’t get it. When it comes to low-wage women and people of color in job sites scattered all over the country, where’s the competition? No other union wants to do it. We have a deal. That’s life. But we’ve organized 15,000 workers, we’re about to organize even more, and people are complaining?”

The truth is, according to SEIU’s own analysis, only a small portion of its explosive growth springs from the controversial employer agreements. More than half of the new workers organized by SEIU between 2002 and 2006 were government workers or government contractors, such as state-funded child-care providers, who came into the union as a result of pressure campaigns on governors and state legislatures. Of the remainder, 16 percent came in through old-style Labor Board elections, 13 percent through corporate campaigns (the stick) and 13 percent through agreements that include various quid pro quos (the carrot).

“It’s legitimate to have disagreements about what is or isn’t in the agreements,” says Woodruff, now organizing director for Change to Win. “We’re constantly second-guessing ourselves. But it’s not productive to really being able to analyze and correct mistakes to have a big public brouhaha.”

Cornell University’s Kate Bronfenbrenner, who has done extensive research into these kinds of agreements, says, “Neutrality agreements are necessary in a climate where employers wage war when workers try to organize. But on the other hand, unions that do top-down organizing, who don’t involve the members, are not going to build lasting unions. Research shows it again and again. They won’t be able to survive; they’re not going to be able to withstand employer attacks. These are big questions many unions need to wrestle with.”

SEIU leaders may debate the merits of their opposition, but the sheer explosion of dissent—from one of the country’s most progressive unions, CNA; from the leadership of one of its largest, and most rapidly growing, Locals, UHW; from its own staff; from the students and community allies SEIU depends on to run its successful corporate campaigns—indicates, at least, a crisis of confidence in the union’s leadership. Stern has been astonishingly successful at communicating his vision to the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal* and winning the trust of hostile corporate leaders. But the evidence is accumulating that he’s not been nearly as adept at bringing along his own labor movement—and his own membership.

If he places UHW in trusteeship and removes Sal Rosselli and his executive board, he’ll confirm the worst images of SEIU painted by Rose Ann DeMoro, of a gang of purple-clad street thugs, whose first principle is *omertà*. But if he can guide delegates through a process of meaningful compromise at the convention, with a friendly eye toward some of the dissident proposals on local autonomy; if he can sit down and negotiate a truce with CNA (and indeed, in late May, Stern told *The Nation*

The voices raised against Stern are deeply invested in building what he calls ‘a more just and humane society for all working people.’

that the two parties had just agreed to hire a mediator and try to come to terms), then his claim to be reinvigorating the labor movement as a whole will gain new credibility.

The truth is that the pressure on SEIU is coming from labor progressives—not complacent labor chiefs signing off on give-backs until they reach retirement. The voices raised against Stern are deeply invested in reversing labor’s decline, in positioning unions to shape national policy, in building—as Stern puts it in his most recent white paper—“a more just and humane society for all working people.”

CNA is as committed to building labor as Stern is; it’s even faster growing, and equally driven to solve the nation’s health-care crisis—hardly one of the “I got mine” unions that Stern rails against. Sal Rosselli is an SEIU lifer; if he gets trustee’d, he says, he’ll just get a job in a nursing home and run for president of his Local again as a member.

As for Roxanne Sanchez, the union-president-turned-rank-and-filer, when she spoke with me in late May, she said this was the first time in ten years she’d publicly criticized Andy Stern. “The international, through Andy Stern, has done a lot of good things, visionary things,” she says. But she hopes that at the convention in Puerto Rico workers will be able to recover some local autonomy and a sense of empowerment. “The critical comments are an attempt to make him take heed that workers have a place at his table, to speak to him directly, about direction, strategy, policy and politics. I know he sits down with world leaders, with his executive leaders, but at this table, there’s got to be a place for a regular old worker who has worked for thirty years to grow this union. I hope at the convention he’ll respond as the leader that I think he is.” ■

Mr. Lessig Goes to Washington

The visionary professor who inspired the “free culture” movement takes on money in politics.

by CHRISTOPHER HAYES

In late March, Stanford law professor Lawrence Lessig came to DC to draw back the curtain on the second act of his career. Lessig, with his placid mien and quiet voice, does not exude the aura of a star, but over the past decade he's become one of the most influential public intellectuals of the Internet age. Along with a small group of activists, legal academics and computer geeks, Lessig has built from scratch a global grassroots movement to reform copyright and intellectual property law. Videos of his lectures are passed along like *samizdat* by bloggers. “The first time I ever saw him speak,” says Cory Doctorow, co-editor of BoingBoing, one of the country's most popular blogs, “I remember having the doors blown off my mind.” Fans line up at events with worn copies of his books to ask for everything from signatures to career advice. It is, in the estimation of Aaron Swartz, a 21-year-old programming prodigy who's worked with Lessig since 2001, “a weird kind of celebrity.”

Lessig stunned his legions of fans last summer when he abruptly announced he was walking away from the cause that had defined his career. For the next ten years, he said, he would be focusing on a new problem: fighting corruption in politics. So to announce his new venture he'd come to Washington, home to what he considers the most dangerously corrupt institution in the country: the United States Congress. With his new netroots-style reform advocacy organization, Change Congress, Lessig is determined to clean it up.

To many of the Beltway denizens crowded into the over-capacity room at the National Press Club on March 20, Lessig was only a faintly familiar name. Since announcing his new career path, though, he has worked hard to raise his political profile. He endorsed and has campaigned for his onetime University of Chicago colleague Barack Obama. In February, when Congressman Tom Lantos died, Lessig toyed with the idea of running for the seat in the special election. He posted a ten-minute video explaining his platform, centered around campaign finance reform, and set up a website to accept donations. He raised more than \$60,000 in just two weeks before ultimately deciding not to run. At this year's Netroots Nation (formerly YearlyKos), the annual convention of the Internet's progressive activists, he will be delivering a keynote address.

Lessig has become enough of a player to merit the attention of the right-wing attack machine. After he showed a clip during a talk of an Argentine artist's video featuring Jesus dancing to Gloria Gaynor's “I Will Survive” before getting hit by a bus, RedState.com, Sean Hannity and Rush Limbaugh all tore into him as “anti-Christian.” Fox News even sent a camera to ambush him after he testified at a recent Senate hearing.

Political reporter Thomas Edsall, in his 1984 book *The New Politics of Inequality*, draws a distinction between two types of reformers in the center-left coalition. The vast majority of

interest groups in Washington, from the Sierra Club to the AFL-CIO to Planned Parenthood, are pursuing what Edsall calls “substantive reform”—attempting to push legislation and enact policies that will provide public goods, protect citizens from harm and redistribute benefits, rights and privileges away from the powerful and toward middle-class citizens and disenfranchised minorities. Then there's a small cluster of about a dozen groups—Public Campaign, the Center for Responsive Politics and the Sunlight Foundation—that focus on procedural reform. Rather than trying to win the game, they're trying to



KAREN CALDICOTT

change the rules: pushing for broader enfranchisement, more transparency and, crucially, reforms that will reduce the influence of big money on politics.

The procedural reformers, many of whom were in the audience at Lessig's Press Club talk, have some significant victories they can point to over the past several decades, most notably the public financing system set up for presidential elections after Watergate and the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act of 2002 (*aka* McCain-Feingold), which banned soft money. Recently, they've had success at the state level, pushing through clean elections laws in Maine and Arizona. But each reform to limit big money in politics is followed by innovations that only increase its role, leading many to conclude that attempting to change the rules is a pointless quest; energy would be better spent on trying to win within the regime. “If you think it's hard trying to get oil companies to pay attention to global warming,” Dan Becker, a longtime environmental activist told me, “just try working on getting money out of politics.”

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What gives Lessig a unique credibility as he embarks on his new career as process reformer is his former life pursuing substantive reform. Before there was Lawrence Lessig, corruption crusader, there was Lawrence Lessig, copyright crusader. In the 1990s, when he started writing about the dangers of a sclerotic, overly restrictive intellectual property regime, few besides industry groups like the RIAA and MPAA and a tiny circle of academics paid much attention. So it was easy, in 1998, for Congress to pass overwhelmingly the Sonny Bono Copyright Term Extension Act, which President Clinton signed into law, extending copyright protections for twenty additional years, bringing the total guaranteed copyright term to seventy years after a creator's death (Since Disney had lobbied strongly for the bill, critics dubbed it the Mickey Mouse Protection Act.)

In the absence of high-profile voices countering the industry groups that dominated the issue, Lessig became an evangelist for the cause of what he calls "free culture." He and his allies argue that cultural vibrance, scientific progress and business innovation all rely on the diffusion of knowledge, a diffu-

What gives Lessig credibility as he embarks on his new career as a process reformer is his former life pursuing substantive reform.

sion threatened by an intellectual property regime that attempts to keep that knowledge trapped in a proprietary vault. What they see happening is a modern-day rerun of the eighteenth-century enclosure movement, in which the British commons were brought under private control. But here, instead of using fences to capture land, the private interests are manipulating the law to keep cultural production and the knowledge needed for technological innovation out of the public domain.

Take Disney, for example, which built its entire entertainment empire—from *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* to *Beauty and the Beast*—on the works of others, works in the public domain. But today, if anyone tried to make their own movie based on Mickey Mouse, they'd find themselves on the business end of a lawsuit.

In 1998 Lessig began flying around the country, giving as many as a hundred talks a year at college campuses, and in so doing helped spark a movement. "He developed and refined this really effective speaking style over the years," says Lessig's friend Swartz. Lessig speaks in a halting monotone, while displaying a steady stream of slides with single words or phrases in white set against a black background. The cumulative effect is oddly compelling. Nelson Pavlovsky, a law student at George Mason University, founded the first chapter of Students for Free Culture as an undergraduate at Swarthmore, after watching a video of a Lessig lecture posted on the Internet. Today, Students for Free Culture has twenty-six chapters.

Faced with implacable resistance to copyright reform from big industry groups, Lessig tried a variety of tactical maneuvers. In 1999 he challenged the Bono Act, taking the case all the way to the Supreme Court. Though his friends and col-

leagues advised him it was unwinnable, Lessig thought the underlying principle so clear, and the Constitution's language about "limited" copyright terms so plain, that he would prevail. But he managed to win only two dissenting votes, from Justices Stevens and Breyer. "He had a terrible reaction to losing the...case," recalls Richard Posner, a seventh circuit judge Lessig had once clerked for. "I told him truthfully... nobody could have won that case. That case was a clear loser. He couldn't accept that. He was terribly upset about that loss."

Lessig didn't wallow for long. He threw himself into starting and promoting Creative Commons, an alternative licensing system that allows creators to specify how other people can use their work, voluntarily giving up some of the rights that copyright automatically reserves. Artists, writers, scientists and others can select from different Creative Commons licenses, which allow the works to be shared, excerpted, reused or re-mixed under certain conditions, for instance, proper citation and credit. Creative Commons' tagline "some rights reserved" is a rebuke of the "all right reserved" tag line that

appears under copyrighted works. It's been remarkably successful: more than 90 million works are now licensed under CC, a figure that's more than doubled since 2006.

In the words of fellow cyber-law expert Yochai Benkler, Creative Commons was a way to "jury-rig" a copyright system that embodied free culture values. For all its

success, only a tiny percentage of all works generated each year bore a Creative Commons license. Since the Supreme Court has declined to overrule Congress, overhauling the nation's intellectual property regime could happen only by moving legislation through Washington. And Washington had proven too broken.

Lessig's years rolling the copyright boulder up the hill served as the narrative inspiration for his talk at the Press Club. For Lessig, copyright is just one example of the ways money corrupts the Congressional process by preventing Congress from getting what he calls the "easy cases" right. Nearly every expert who's studied copyright term has concluded that it shouldn't be extended retroactively: Milton Friedman once referred to this position as a "no-brainer." But that hasn't stopped big corporations like Disney, which stands to lose a considerable amount of money when Mickey Mouse becomes public property, from pushing through legislation that extends copyright protections for old works.

It's the same dynamic with a host of issues, from the farm bill to the role of contractors in Iraq to an issue Lessig calls "the most profound" we face: global warming. There, the scientific consensus is absolute, the stakes dire and yet action has been routinely thwarted by a coterie of corporations that have a monumental monetary interest in the status quo. "Really, who cares about Mickey Mouse," Lessig told me over dinner the night before his talk. "But if we can't get global warming right? An easy question as fundamental as global warming? Then we're really fucked."

In comparison to saving the planet from immolation, ending donations from lobbyists might seem insignificant, Lessig told the audience at the Press Club. But the problem Congress



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faces is akin to that faced by an alcoholic. "An alcoholic could be losing his family, his job, his liver," said Lessig. "These are extraordinarily important problems in any scheme of reckoning; these are the most important problems he could be facing. But he will never face and solve those problems until he solves this alcoholism first. This problem that I've described is not the most important problem, it's just the first problem.... We need to solve this problem now."

Sitting in a Washington coffee shop the morning after the speech, distractedly nibbling on carrots and grapes, Lessig seems an unlikely evangelist. "The reason I wanted to be an academic was not because I had some deep romantic idea about teaching or rearing young minds, though that's a great part of the job," he says. It was "just the freedom, just being allowed to say what you believe, write without any of these kinds of restraints in your life."

At 46, Lessig has a boyish face, vaguely reminiscent of Harry Potter. He engages each question with a pursed, furrowed look of absolute concentration before unfurling an alarmingly coherent answer, often beginning sentences with the word "so," which makes it feel like you're encountering him mid-thought and need to catch up. "There's something kind of monkish about him, or austere," Posner told me. "When he taught at Chicago he had an apartment that was extraordinarily bare, like

In fighting corporate socialism, Lessig thinks there are allies to be found among the 'intellectually honest' right.

a monk's cell." Lessig is kind of an "ice-capped volcano," says Posner—his chilly exterior covers a passionate zeal. "He works harder than anybody I have ever met," says Lessig's good friend Alex Whiting. "It's unbelievable."

Lessig likely inherits his work ethic from his father, who owned a steel fabricating company in Williamsport, Pennsylvania, a small town in the middle of the state, where, Lessig says, "the sun shone around twenty-five days a year." As a teenager Lessig took on his father's Goldwaterite politics as his own, and he spent his high school years as an Alex P. Keaton-style "right-wing nut." In 1980 he was the youngest member of the Pennsylvania delegation at the Republican convention, when it nominated Ronald Reagan.

At Cambridge, where he studied philosophy after college, Lessig began a political conversion. "In some sense," he says, "I think that education made it impossible for me to be the kind of narrow, simple conservative that I was." He went on to clerk on the Supreme Court for Antonin Scalia (he was the lone liberal clerk), and has become an outspoken progressive. He was an early supporter of Howard Dean's presidential campaign and invited him to guest blog on his site.

But Lessig's political loyalties aside, his critique is not particularly partisan. His copyright activism originated in the late 1990s, in the wake of the Clinton Administration's industry-friendly Telecommunications Act, and his experience working on copyright and tech policy gives him a some perspective on Washington's dysfunctions. For years the most zealous defend-

ers of the interests of the recording studios and film conglomerates have been Democrats. (Perhaps his greatest nemesis—and eventually a friend—was Jack Valenti, the late, great Democrat who ran the MPAA and once considered kids who downloaded songs off Napster part of a "terrorist war.")

In the past eight years the collusion between government and business has gotten worse, creating what economist Dean Baker terms the "conservative nanny state." Lessig sees unmaking this state of affairs as the challenge of the era. "There's a speech that Reagan gives in 1965," Lessig says, "where he talks about how democracy always fails because once the people recognize they can vote themselves largess, they just vote themselves largess and the fiscal policy is destroyed. Well, Reagan had it half-right. It's not as if it's the poor out there who have figured out how to suck the money out of the rich. It's exactly the other way around."

In fighting this corporate socialism, Lessig thinks there are allies to be found among the "intellectually honest" right. He points out that the need to raise money from industry provides an incentive to grow government and maintain regulation as a kind of leverage to extract donations from industry. He's made battling earmarks, a conservative cause célèbre, a Change Congress core mission; the first member of Congress to endorse Change Congress was Jim Cooper, a conservative

blue-dog Democrat who is eyed suspiciously by the party's activist base. Lessig's touchstone in his conservative outreach is his father, who struggled every year to meet his company's pension obligations, only to learn years later that big companies like Bethlehem Steel had an exemption in the law so they didn't have to meet

the same standards. "Now, from my modern political perspective, that's exactly the thing I think is most outrageous about how the government functions," says Lessig. "And from my dad's perspective, that's the most absurd thing about how government functions."

In today's terms, you might call it the Medicare Part D problem: even when Congress starts out with a laudable policy goal, like providing prescription drugs for seniors, by the time the legislation gets through both houses it amounts to little more than a grab bag of giveaways to politically connected business interests. Case in point: the recent Senate-passed Foreclosure Prevention Act, which contains \$25 billion in tax breaks for home-builders and other businesses while doing very little to justify its name. The reason for this is straightforward: the amount of money spent on lobbying in the last Congressional session was \$2.8 billion, nearly two times more than was spent in 2000. Overall, industry has contributed \$14 billion to Congressional candidates in this session.

This money, Lessig says, insidiously distorts Congressional outcomes and priorities because Congress members don't experience it as corruption. "Let's say you go to Congress," says Lessig, "and you believe there are two problems to deal with: piracy of copyrighted materials and welfare mothers who are really getting screwed by the system. You open up shop, and a million [lobbyists] come in and say we've got a thousand things to tell you about piracy, and nobody comes into your office and says we're going to help you with the welfare moms.

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Of course, good-government reformers have been decrying the influence of money since at least the late nineteenth century. For all of Lessig's status as a visionary (he literally wrote the book on cyberspace law), what's most striking is that, as he admits, Change Congress doesn't embody any "new ideas." He envisions it as a movement tool kit that connects citizens to the work of the reform groups that already exist, a kind of "Google Maps mashup," as he puts it.

"There have been all sorts of DC-based organizations that have tried to crack this nut, and I think they've hit the limit of what the 'Let's send out an e-mail to our 100,000 members and tell them to write their Congressmen' model can do," he says. "We have an opportunity—and it won't last long—to take advantage of the uncertainty that Congress has about how the Net actually works. They don't get it right now. And while they've learned how to ignore 1,000 e-mails, they haven't quite figured out what to do about fifty blogs talking about various legislation or meet-up events. So there's an opportunity to leverage the technology and the irrational insecurity of members of Congress, who look at any objectively insignificant resistance as something to be dealt with immediately."

Ellen Miller, a veteran of campaign finance reform battles, who co-founded the Center for Responsive Politics and Public Campaign and now runs the Sunlight Foundation, says "there was some skepticism" among campaign finance activists toward Lessig's initiative. But, she says, "organizing around issues happens differently than any of the old-line reform groups ever thought it did," pointing to "the online-offline combination, using social media to build a community of people that might have already existed out there [that] Common Cause and Public Campaign couldn't figure out how to reach. He can figure out how to reach them, how to create communities that would have been impossible to find before."

The first feature available on Change Congress's website, modeled loosely on the Creative Commons licensing system, allows citizens, Congress members and Congressional candidates to commit publicly to four pledges—to refuse PAC and lobbyist money, support public financing, vote to end earmarks and increase Congressional transparency. Candidates who take the pledge can display a badge on their website.

This information will be displayed in a map, which Lessig believes will show in stark terms just how "broad and deep" the consensus for reform is. Take, for instance, the ultimate prize for Lessig and reform allies: public financing of Congressional campaigns. A 2006 poll showed overwhelming support among voters (75 percent) for such a system. The Fair Elections Now Act, introduced by Senators Dick Durbin and Arlen Specter, has attracted eight co-sponsors (including Barack Obama), and Hillary Clinton is on record as supporting public financing in principle if not the Durbin bill specifically. While McCain supported full public financing as recently as 2002, he retracted that position last year. This is not to say we're anywhere close to having public financing enacted—the

interests opposed to it are substantial—but it is by no means a fringe idea.

In the future, Lessig envisions a Change Congress fundraising arm, modeled in part on EMILY's List, that will allow people to pledge money to Congressional candidates who match their reform preferences and endorse insurgents who challenge incumbents in their party's primary on a reform platform.

In just a month since announcing Change Congress, the organization has raised \$500,000 and hired three staff members. But how effective it will be is unclear. Even if it were to succeed in further empowering and connecting the constituency already disposed to support this kind of reform, the challenge is to dramatically increase that constituency and, most daunting, transform process reform into the kind of issue that, like abortion or gun rights, people will base their vote on. "The hero worship may go a long way," said one longtime campaign finance activist. "But those who aren't part of his inner circle are going to be baffled, or they are going to be put off by apparent arrogance." However, she says, "I think technologists achieve a lot because they are blind to that distaste for arrogance, or they just don't care, and they move forward, and that's how they get so much done. They're not trying to be liked; they're trying to create something new."

Though playing David to various Goliaths (armed with a laptop as slingshot) is the defining narrative of Lessig's career, as we finish our conversation in the coffee shop he tells me he feels like he's "never actually...won anything. I constantly feel like, when will I actually deliver?"

Which probably explains why Lessig was tempted to run for Congress. What would be a more quixotic quest than running for Congress as an unknown against a popular local pol? What better venue to prove that process reform can be a real vote-moving issue? After a few supporters organized a Draft Lessig website, he began to consider announcing his candidacy. He hired Joe Trippi and spent \$30,000 on an exploratory poll, the results of which were "completely terrible," recalls Swartz. Not only did he have no name recognition but his would-be opponent, State Senator (now Congresswoman) Jackie Speier was "an absolute saint to the district. No matter what you said about her in the polls"—that she, for instance, took contributions from the same industries she regulated in the State Senate—"people just didn't care. So it would have been physically impossible for us to persuade enough voters to win, even in a low-turnout special election."

But Lessig gave up the notion of running reluctantly. "We spent a lot of time trying to think if there was some way we could make it work," says Swartz. "There was just no way to break in. It was depressing." Trippi says Lessig's disappointment was evident. "I think he would have relished the opportunity to be out there and try to convince the district—of seeing if he could beat those odds."

"When I was thinking of running," Lessig says, "the biggest pushback I got was from all these senior politico types who are like, Look, you can never sell process reform; nobody will ever buy it; if that's your message, you cannot win. And my response is, Well, we've got to figure out how to sell it, for Chrissake! It's not like we have a choice." ■

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Letter From Lille: Echoes of '68

France has by far the most vibrant revolutionary left in Western Europe.

by MARC PERELMAN

When French students began demonstrating forty years ago this spring to demand more autonomy in the universities and to protest the stifling rule of Gen. Charles de Gaulle, many thought it would be just another bout of youthful elitist exuberance. But after the stone-throwing and sloganeering in the streets of Paris's Latin Quarter led to a general workers' strike and the Fifth Republic nearly collapsed, May 1968 became a seminal moment in modern French history—a movement of hope and liberation infused with far-left and anarchic undercurrents in the eyes of its supporters, a crisis that threatened to plunge stolid France into chaos, in the somber view of its foes.

In the wake of *les événements*, when dreams of utopia still hovered in the air, new left parties mushroomed, giving succor to the bubbling and sometimes contradictory tensions animating May '68. One of them was the Communist League, a small Trotskyist group formed in 1969 that openly challenged the monopoly of the Socialist and Communist parties on the left. It denounced the compromises of the Socialists with the market economy and of the Communists with the crimes of Stalin and the Soviet Union. The Communist League even ran one of the May '68 student leaders, Alain Krivine, in the presidential elections the following year. He garnered only about 1 percent of the vote, and the small party, beset by ideological and personal divisions, never blossomed into a political force, a reflection of the fact that May '68 was in the end more a cultural revolution than a political one.

As France commemorates the fortieth anniversary with a flurry of debates, books, movies and celebrations, the Old Left looks its age. The Socialist Party is divided, the Communist Party is a shambles and the supporters of both are searching for answers. Enter Olivier Besancenot, the charismatic 34-year-old leader of the Revolutionary Communist League, the successor of the Communist League, known by its French acronym LCR.

Surfing on the mounting resentment toward the pro-market policies of conservative President Nicolas Sarkozy, the tepid opposition of the establishment left and his own newfound popularity, Besancenot is convinced that the time is ripe to upset the existing order.

So on a chilly January night, he ventured into France's

Lille



Revolutionary Communist League leader Olivier Besancenot at a rally last year

northern region. With its hulking steel mills and red-brick mining towns from a bygone era, its rich cast of trade-union and political leaders, the north of France has for decades been a bastion of the Old Left.

Besancenot had come to urge leftist militants to join the new "anticapitalist" party the LCR decided to form at its last annual gathering in a daring bid to rejuvenate itself and lure disillusioned members of the Old Left and the younger, anti-racist and global justice crowd.

This is no joke. To be sure, no Trotskyist will likely ever sit in the Élysée Palace, and power will probably continue to alternate between a conservative bloc and the Socialist Party for years to come. But two decades after the fall of the Berlin Wall, France has by far the most vibrant revolutionary left in Western Europe. And Besancenot, a postman who doubles as the LCR's chief spokesman, is probably its most able representative, an everyday man turned charismatic national figure, a young amateur politician standing out in a sea of party apparatchiks.

Striding onto the podium of a small concert hall wearing his trademark bluejeans and black sweater, Olivier, as his supporters call him, lunged into the "France from above" embodied by Sarkozy and greedy CEOs while hammering the "social-liberal" left for its failure to stand its ground and defend the "France from below."

"What is missing is a left as comfortable with itself as Sarkozy is comfortable with being from the right," he told an enthusiastic young crowd of several hundred.

In essence, with the new party Besancenot is trying to close the gap between the tiny membership of the LCR and its improved electoral showings (around 5 percent in the last two presidential polls) and, even more so, his standing as one of the most popular French politicians on the left. He was even

Marc Perelman has been the diplomatic correspondent for the Forward for the past seven years, where he has covered Middle East affairs, terrorism and the United Nations and has reported extensively from South America, Europe and Africa. He has also written for the International Herald Tribune, Le Monde, Fortune, National Journal, Salon, Mother Jones and Foreign Policy.

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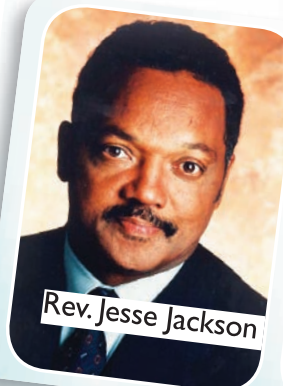
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recently invited on a popular Sunday afternoon family entertainment program, a decision that elicited some grumbling from old-timers about the “people-ization” of Besancenot. But he is adamant that this is not about himself: “It will not be Besancenot’s party. There is something deep going on; people are willing to get back to political action, here and abroad,” he told me before the Lille meeting in a small room plastered with Soviet-style fliers heralding the new party and the LCR’s main slogan, “Our lives are worth more than their profits.”

In Germany, Britain, Italy, Denmark, Spain and Portugal, far-left groups have joined broader leftist coalitions, some of which have won parliamentary seats. But in those countries they have tended to drift toward the traditional left, whereas Besancenot’s objective is to remain firmly anchored to the far left. And while Die Linke (the Left Party) in Germany or Rifondazione Comunista (Communist Re-foundation Party) in Italy are led by former Socialists and/or Communists and professional politicians, France presents a drastically different picture. In addition to the postman Besancenot, the far left’s main leaders are peasant activist José

Olivier Besancenot is probably the LCR’s most able representative, an everyday man turned charismatic national figure.

Bové and former bank employee Arlette Laguiller.

Laguiller broke the glass ceiling in 1995 when she obtained 5.7 percent of the vote in the presidential election, more than doubling her score from three previous attempts. In 2002 Besancenot ran for the first time and approached that performance, contributing to a historic defeat for the Socialist candidate. In last year’s poll, with leftist voters massively throwing their support behind Socialist candidate Ségolène Royal to avoid such an outcome, the far left receded—except for Besancenot. With 4.1 percent of the ballot, he emerged as its clear leader, garnering twice as many votes as not only Laguiller but also the Communist Party candidate.

The free fall of the French Communist Party, long a powerhouse that attracted around 20 percent of the votes at each national election between 1945 and 1979, is the most notable political development of the past twenty years. Rather than join the Socialist Party, a sizable number of its voters swung to the far right and helped propel the National Front of Jean-Marie Le Pen into the big league of national politics. But in recent years, the “left of the left” has been able to lure some of those disaffected Communists.

In addition to this changing of the guard on the left, there are some distinctively French reasons behind the resilience of its revolutionary left. One is a deeply rooted tradition of vigorous social movements. It’s no wonder France is known as the country of strikes and demonstrations; since a barometer was set up by the CSA polling institute in 1995 to measure public reaction to such movements, a large majority of the French have offered support for most of them.

In addition, the French Socialist Party, despite its years in

power under former President François Mitterrand and former Prime Minister Lionel Jospin, has not embraced the market economy as fully as have its siblings in Germany and Britain. With good reason: according to a 2005 poll taken by the GlobeScan institute, only 36 percent of the French agree with the claim that “the free enterprise system and free market economy is the best system on which to base the future of the world,” compared with 66 percent of the British and 65 percent of the Germans.

This, however, does not explain another French mystery: the durability of the Trotskyists compared with their Communist or Maoists rivals. The obvious answer is that Maoism and orthodox Communism were directly linked to repressive regimes in Beijing and Moscow—and thus were the collateral victims of their disgrace. By contrast, Trotskyism always portrayed itself as a victim of Stalinism and, as such, retained the aura of romanticism attached to an unfulfilled dream. Moreover, its avant-garde dimension lured numerous sympathizers in the heady days after the May ’68 upheaval, several of whom went on to become public figures: politicians such as Jospin and Pierre Moscovici and intellectuals such as journalist Edwy Plenel. Although they have long renounced their youthful engagement, their trajectory bestows on Trotskyism the kind of cultural prestige so dear to the French.

Two of the three branches of French Trotskyism—Lutte Ouvrière (Workers’ Struggle) and the Workers’ Party—still hew to the old ideology. The LCR, however, has strived to embody a more modern incarnation since its founding. Over the years, it has embraced feminism, environmentalism and, lately, the global justice movement. And while this multiple advocacy has somewhat blurred its image, it is proving to be an asset in the eyes of the new generation. The LCR has doubled its membership since 2002, and most of its recruits are young. A November 2007 IFOP poll shows that while Besancenot would obtain 7 percent in a presidential election, the figure climbs to 12 percent among those born between 1977 and 1982.

Sylvain Pattieu, the 29-year-old head of the LCR’s list for the recent municipal elections in a working-class Paris neighborhood, is a case in point. A history professor, he got acquainted with the LCR through the anti-racist organization Ras-le-Front. Since becoming a member in 1997, he has continued to be involved in trade union and global justice activities. “I couldn’t go to the Communist Party because of [its associations with] the USSR, and I found Lutte Ouvrière too rigid. The LCR was both radical and open-minded,” he told me.

In addition to becoming younger, the LCR has become closer to the average population sociologically. After years of recruiting mostly among teachers and civil servants, its membership among the working class has recently surged, shedding its intellectual image. Those trends are especially telling at a time when the membership of the Socialist Party is becoming more bourgeois and the Communist Party’s is aging.

Henri Weber, a former LCR militant who is now a Socialist official, does not buy the face-lift argument. He claims

that his old organization still functions with the same mindset and ideology as in the 1960s and '70s. To be sure, the LCR recently ousted a faction that advocated an alliance with the traditional left, and its website still claims that only a frontal assault can undo the capitalist system, warning that "the clash is inevitable; we must prepare for it." The site intones that "between two legitimacies, two powers...antagonistic social interests, coexistence cannot last. Force will decide."

Besancenot, the son of a physics teacher and a school psychologist who joined the LCR's youth wing in the late 1980s, uses a distinctively different vocabulary. In his writings and in speeches, he steers clear of loaded expressions such as class warfare, armed revolution or dictatorship of the proletariat. "I don't define myself as Trotskyist; I'd rather use 'contemporary revolutionary,'" he offered when I asked him to define himself. "I don't have a ready-made recipe to bring about a better society. Revolution is not a dogma laid out in a Little Red Book."

This pragmatism explains why no name has been chosen for the new party and why it will not be affiliated with the Fourth International, a cornerstone of Trotskyist identity. The name and platform are to be decided at a constitutional assembly slated for late this year, which will mark the culmination of a nationwide series of meetings at the local and regional level.

"We are ready to turn a page from our history," Besancenot told the Lille audience. "We don't want to be an elitist, avant-garde movement wasting its time with philosophical discussions lasting until three in the morning."

Alain Krivine, an LCR founder and one of those endless debaters, swears he will not miss the all-nighters arguing about Stalin's crimes and Trotsky's greatness. "Communism doesn't mean anything to the new generation. You can't just go on talking about this," he told me in his office at the headquarters of the LCR, located in the working-class Paris suburb of Montreuil. "We have tried many times before to create a party but we failed. This time, we feel the situation has never been as favorable, with vibrant social movements and strong electoral results."

Not to mention the election of Sarkozy, an avowed neoliberal who enjoyed record popularity in the wake of his election last spring but who has seen his poll numbers plunge in recent months. Most analysts point to the contrast between the ostentatious display of his private life, first and foremost his public affair with and marriage to model-cum-singer Carla Bruni, and the struggles of the average French, as the main reason. Besancenot, however, is convinced something deeper—and more promising to the left—is afoot.

"I don't give a hoot about Carla Bruni," he told the audience in Lille. "The truth is Sarkozy's policies are exasperating a growing number of people. And here is some news: he doesn't even have the means to implement them because the public coffers are empty, so even the France from above is beginning to smell the coffee."

Besancenot's denunciations of the excesses of capitalism; his advocacy of higher salaries, free education and cheap housing;

and his support for Palestine and Chechnya are popular beyond the far left. But when it comes to defending the rights of undocumented immigrants, he is at odds with the feelings of large segments of the working class, who have been receptive to Le Pen's "France for the French" mantra. A more calculating politician would probably have avoided this issue, but Besancenot told the mostly white crowd in Lille that "a leftist doesn't hesitate" when it comes to defending the disenfranchised.

Krivine acknowledges that seeking out recruits by, as he puts it, "telling people, 'We're the ones who defend Negroes and fags. Got a problem with that?'" is probably not what political gurus would recommend. But he argues that not doing this would betray a central tenet of the movement. Besides, he noted, the integrity embodied by the LCR and Besancenot was a prized asset in an era of low public trust in politicians.

In addition to those ideological dilemmas, political scientist Vincent Tiberj argues that the party will face three major obstacles: the fractious nature of the far left (Lutte Ouvrière has already announced that it will not join, claiming that the new formation appears ready to jettison Marxism, Leninism and

'Sarkozy's policies are exasperating a growing number of people.... He doesn't even have the means to implement them.' —Besancenot

Trotskyism); the volatile nature of its electorate; and its lack of a truly national base, since the LCR has generally been present only in several large cities and suburbs, barely registering in rural areas and small towns. (The LCR did score its best performance ever during a round of municipal elections in March, with 109 of its 200 lists getting more than 5 percent of the vote and and twenty-nine lists garnering more than 10 percent. Most notably, it performed well not only in working-class suburbs and industrial areas but also in several midsize towns.)

"They don't have a culture of consensus, they have a culture of difference," Tiberj told me. "And let's not forget that a sizable number of their voters cast their ballots to vent and not because they believe it will bring about the revolution."

Success will indeed mean convincing voters that the party actually wants to govern and not just protest. But it may ultimately depend on Besancenot. To be sure, all LCR senior officials, first and foremost Besancenot, sing the praises of collective leadership. But they know better. As the veteran Krivine admitted, "We may not agree with the personalization of politics, but we use it." And there lies the rub. Besancenot told me he would not run again for president and seems genuinely eager to recede into the shadows.

After concluding his one-hour speech in Lille with a passionate call for "a socialism for the twenty-first century," Besancenot did not bask in the cheers of the audience as any politician would. He joined the local LCR leaders on the podium to sing the "Internationale," his face looking down, his right fist softly clenched in the air and his left hand tucked in his jeans pocket. He then deftly avoided the swarm of well-wishers and disappeared through a back door into the foggy northern night. ■

Translating *Our Bodies, Ourselves*

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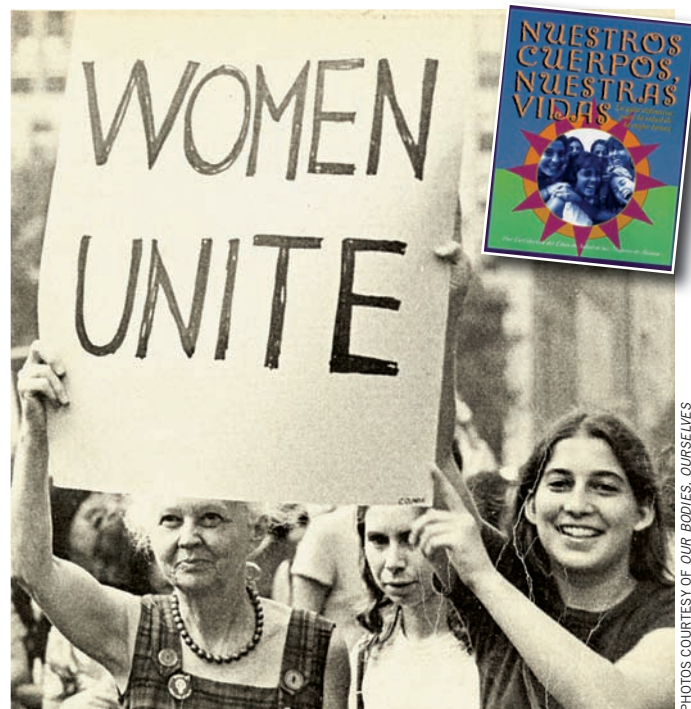
by LINDA GORDON

The progressive social movements of the last half-century produced millions of pages of print, from manifestos to journalism to novels, but nothing as influential as *Our Bodies, Ourselves*. The feminist women's health manual is the American left's most valuable written contribution to the world. This claim is meant to be provocative, of course, but it's true. The publication of an excellent book about the book, Kathy Davis's *The Making of Our Bodies, Ourselves: How Feminism Travels Across Borders*, makes this a good time to examine its impact.

Our Bodies, Ourselves spoke for a women's health movement that transformed American medicine and popular health-and-sexuality culture. In the 1960s, physicians commonly addressed female patients as if they could not understand medical diagnoses and sometimes withheld information about their illnesses; unmarried women could not legally get birth control; women who sought sterilization had to qualify under an arbitrary formula (number of children x patient's age = >120), while poor and minority women were sometimes sterilized without their knowledge, let alone consent; women were routinely excluded from clinical trials of important drugs; women discussed breast cancer in whispers with a sense of shame. A nationwide hypocrisy pretended that sex fit only in marriage; most gays and lesbians had to dissemble when seeking health-care; Americans mostly believed that whole milk, red meat and cheese were fundamental to a healthy diet.

Starting from this landscape, the achievements of the American women's health movement are impressive: prohibiting coercive sterilizations, opening public discussion of breast cancer, regaining women's control over childbirth, requiring physicians' honesty toward patients, radically increasing the number of female doctors and women's health centers, impelling sex manuals to discuss women's sexual pleasure as well as men's and maintaining—barely, against unremitting attack—the right to reproductive choice. But few understand these victories as the hard-fought products of a social movement.

The original book, published in 1970 on newsprint for 75 cents, sold 250,000 copies without a commercial distributor. The radical content of the book would have been inconceivable without the civil rights/new left/feminist context. It included a left-wing critique of medicine in a corporate economy; detailed line drawings of genitalia, complete with pubic hair and the variety of hymens different women might have; a discussion of sex that presented heterosexuality, lesbianism, masturbation and celibacy as equally healthy; a section on abortion that told



PHOTOS COURTESY OF OUR BODIES, OURSELVES

the reader where to go to get one, illegally in Massachusetts or legally abroad, and estimated the costs of these options—this was not your standard left-wing political pamphlet.

Even less well-known is that for more than thirty years *Our Bodies, Ourselves* supported and energized women activists throughout Africa, Asia, Latin America and Europe. These women's movements—antiwar, anti-fundamentalist, anti-neoliberalism, pro-human rights—are often the most progressive forces in the field. Worldwide, the book has sold well over 4 million copies (its various versions, some of them unauthorized, and its multiple distributing channels make it impossible to get an exact count) in more than twenty languages from Swedish to Albanian to Korean, not counting Braille and audio versions, with several more translations in progress. The profits, along with much other fundraising, support education, advocacy and new translations. (*Nation* editor Katrina vanden Heuvel helped support the Russian translation.) In other words, the book has had marathon legs. Its global impact comes not mainly from the information it offers but, as feminist scholar Kathy Davis argues, from its radical method: a democratic politics of knowledge and expertise.

The Boston Women's Health Book Collective, which produced the first *Our Bodies, Ourselves* (titled *Women and Their Bodies*), emerged from consciousness raising, the potent organizational tool invented by the women's liberation movement. CR groups, when they worked well, did not aim at therapy or support (although support was an important byproduct) but examined how gender and women's subordination were reproduced and maintained. These small groups created a free space in which women gained the confidence to challenge dictates on the nature of woman by religious leaders, lawmakers and physicians. Consciousness-raising operated on the premise that

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women could challenge even their own assumptions, exploring alternative explanations of, say, why women cleaned and cared for children, and men so often merely “helped.” Through the analysis of shared experience, CR groups developed oppositional interpretations of women’s and men’s “nature,” today called gender. *Our Bodies, Ourselves* continued that process with a focus on health.

If *Our Bodies, Ourselves* had retained its original authorship, the homogeneity of the original Boston-based CR group—in class, race and nationality—would have limited its appeal. The group’s concern with women’s concrete experience led them to gather many personal reports, so the book’s sources grew increasingly varied. As activists in other countries discovered the book, they asked for versions in their own languages. As Davis recounts in her history of the book’s global expansion, the original authors soon came to understand how saturated their book was with the perspective of educated, middle-class, white American women. In fact, the group’s initial *chutzpah* in challenging medical authority was partly a product of these women’s privilege. As their global sophistication increased, the Boston group came to a new understanding of what “translation” requires: Words, sentences, images and anecdotes have different meanings in different contexts. What was oppositional and radical for the Boston authors, such as challenging mainstream medicine, made no sense to women who lacked access to medical care.

The authors realized that you could not just hire a translator, or allow publishers in other countries to hire translators. The non-English versions of *Our Bodies, Ourselves* were adaptations, and they could emerge only from protracted discussion. The authors work closely with “translators,” discussing how to present controversial material and providing help with publishing arrangements, information resources, graphics, fundraising and connections with activists worldwide.

We should not imagine that in these global discussions US feminists were necessarily more “advanced.” In some cultures—and not just European ones—women were accustomed to speaking of sex more frankly than Americans. (Bawdy jokes among women are common, for example, in many conservative Muslim cultures.) Germans thought the book was too focused on motherhood; several Third World women’s groups thought Americans did not grasp the global economy of health.

Kathy Davis watched closely as a group of health activists from throughout Latin America created a 2000 translation, *Nuestros Cuerpos, Nuestras Vidas*. New experiential accounts and illustrations to reflect Latinas’ lives were just the beginning. The “translators” wanted more poetic language, not only for literary reasons but because of the oral traditions of many who would hear but not read the book. One of the most sex-radical images in the book, a woman alone on a bed looking at her vagina and cervix in a mirror, would have made no sense to them, because it assumed the book would be read by an individual in private. The Latinas wanted to reach women who could never buy the book and never had a private room; they oriented their book for group educational meetings. Furthermore, they

disliked the self-help emphasis of *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, which they associated with the individualist, private solutions emphasized by Americans. They banished the words *auto ayuda* and used *ayuda mutual*.

The American book began with a discussion of body image and the yearning for a perfect, sexualized body—pressures the Latinas blamed on a commercialized, wealthy and individualistic culture. Distress about body image was not a major concern in Latin America. Their first chapter, instead, was “Perspectiva Internacional,” which discussed issues the Americans had put at the end of the book: the problems of poor women deprived of resources yet responsible for family maintenance, problems created by neocolonialism and global corporate power. A chart reports educational levels, contraceptive use, maternal mortality (8 per 100,000 in the United States, 650 per 100,000 in Bolivia) and other social indicators across the Americas. Yet, the first sentence in this chapter reads, “Como feministas, sentimos un vínculo entrañable con todas las mujeres” (“As feminists, we feel a close bond with all women”)—a strong assertion of common interests.

The American version began with a discussion of body image—but distress about body image was not a major concern in Latin America.

They also added material. Before their critique of modern scientific medicine they discussed traditional healing practices, distinguishing them from an “Anglo, New Age approach.” They used Mexican religious *retablos*, for example, to honor healers of the past and the foremothers of the “translators.” They discussed women’s activism on issues other than health, such as that of the Madres de Plaza de Mayo in Argentina. The American book mentioned religion only in its discussion of antiabortion activism; the Latinas wrote a fuller and more complex discussion of Catholicism. They believed its sanctity-of-life values could be transformed from a screen for forcing motherhood and subordination on women into the imperative to protect the lives of children already born, of women, of communities.

Our Bodies, Ourselves is no longer a bestseller, and many young American women have not heard of it. Many think they no longer need it because much of its information has become mainstream. But health messages these days typically come from corporations, selling goods and services as commodities, often with reckless claims. Though it faces different challenges, an oppositional health movement is no less needed today than in 1970.

Meanwhile, the terrain has shifted, and much of the leadership of the women’s health movement—and of progressive women’s activism generally—comes from the global South, where *Our Bodies, Ourselves* has become part of a transnational women’s health movement. Active in the anticolonial movements of the mid-twentieth century, women soon saw that national independence by no means guaranteed democracy or public welfare, let alone their emancipation. Some women’s health activism developed from the need to resist negative developments: in a vivid illustration of the diversity of local

conditions, Indian women opposed a coercive population-control policy, while Filipinas opposed suppression of abortion and contraception. A 1977 International Conference on Women and Health jump-started an international women's health movement. Ten international women-and-health meetings have convened at regular intervals, mainly in global South countries. At these, along with the meetings of NGOs accompanying the UN-sponsored gatherings at Nairobi (1985), Cairo (1994) and Beijing (1995), activists shared problems, created ever denser global connections and spread the movement. Regional coalitions supplement national groups in most parts of the world.

For too long, many of the big foundations and aid agencies—and many feminists in the global North—assumed that reproduction control was the highest health priority for poor countries. The international women's health movement works to educate them otherwise, communicating not only grassroots needs but also a global structural analysis of the problems women face. Throughout Africa and parts of Asia, clean water is a top priority, and achieving it means resisting the rapidly encroaching privatization of water. Women want action against pollution, environmental destruction and exposure to toxics in manufacturing and agriculture. Agencies have begun to learn from women's health movements that violence against women and women's poverty are major contributors to HIV/AIDS.

Unfortunately, this activism is largely defensive, in the face of fundamentalist repression and IMF/World Bank "structural adjustment" policies requiring cuts in social, education and

health spending. Health indicators are worsening in many parts of the global South and in former communist countries. Women face pharmaceutical companies' attempts to block generic drugs, privatization and "user fees" for healthcare and education, US bans on foreign aid to effective reproductive and sexual health programs, high levels of violence against women and attempts to impose reactionary religious family law.

Still, world health would be worse without the activism of the international women's health movement. By the mid-1990s, that movement was largely responsible for forcing the World Bank to backtrack somewhat, urging governments to provide at least rudimentary healthcare and treatment for infectious diseases. The new People's Health Movement (phmovement.org) has put women's health issues at the forefront of its campaigns. But compared with the size of the problem—to use a single example, one in 7,300 women in developed countries die during pregnancy or childbirth; in Africa, one in twenty-six—progress has been poor.

As the feminist slogan goes, "Women deliver." In other words, when women control resources, the social gain is greater than when men control resources. Improving health for the poor is as likely to produce progressive change as any other strategy, because health activism these days requires challenging the world's most powerful and destructive forces. Matters of the body are politically fundamental. If *Our Bodies, Ourselves* contributed even in a small way to activating women globally, American feminists can feel proud. ■

Letters

(continued from page 2)

ate' Iran after being asked how she would respond [to] an Iranian nuclear strike against Israel" because of her supposed "desire to compete on a macho foreign policy playing field."

I believe that early in the campaign, Senator Obama was asked a similar question and said flatly that he saw no reason not to authorize strikes inside Pakistan. Why is that kind of macho pandering ignored while we seem never to give breathing room to Senator Clinton?

I have no love for the way Senator Clinton is conducting her campaign. (This, after a fondness—outright crush—for her during her husband's administration.) I also happen to be a black man. Senator Clinton does allow the "race card" to be played to her advantage. Frankly, I'm dismayed by the tone of the entire campaign on both sides of the Democratic race.

NIGEL D. HENRY

NEWPORT, R.I.

Given the almost identical positions of Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama on practically every issue, why has the feminist movement been split by this primary contest? Except for her initial vote for

the war, Clinton and Obama have voted almost identically on the war, and their withdrawal plans are very similar. In terms of intellectual competence they seem to be on an equal footing.

So why isn't the feminist movement 90 percent behind Clinton, as the black vote is 90 percent for Obama? Evidently, racial relationships are much stronger than gender relationships.

But I think there's another reason. It has to do with the relationship between men and women, and it essentially dooms the feminist movement to be split in any contest between a relatively young, attractive man and an older woman. All else being equal, younger women voters consciously or unconsciously are attracted to the man, whereas there is no attraction between men and the older woman candidate. This is borne out by polls that show a large majority of the women supporting Obama are young, whereas those supporting Hillary are older.

SAM PHELAN

SEATTLE

It is not gender or race that matters. The politics of those seeking my vote matter. This 59-year-old Jewish feminist former Edwards supporter has not been enam-

ored of either of the remaining Democratic choices. I resent the thinking that because of my age, race and gender I should support the woman—especially when I've never agreed with her politics.

Has Hillary Clinton been the victim of our sexist, misogynous culture? Definitely. We cannot accept and don't know how to deal with strong women. Would she make a good President? Probably. Better than Barack Obama? Doubtful. When the issues are similar, one has to look at management style. Hers is top-down. Very male. His community-organizing background lets him entertain a more diverse/possibly bottom-up style, allowing people to disagree with him then come to the best decision. I will vote for the Democrat in November. I hope it is someone I can trust.

JEAN COLMAN

OLATHE, KANS.

Thank you, Betsy Reed. This was the best analysis of the feminist view of Hillary I have read. I have felt increasingly that Hillary is not a good representative of women, and Reed helped me to understand why. I hope Obama can move past this unethical way of campaigning!

MARILU GOODYEAR

Books & the Arts.

Adams Ribbed

by NICHOLAS GUYATT

John Adams could never shake the feeling that history would be unkind to him. “I have very serious ideas of the duties of an historian,” he wrote to his friend Benjamin Rush in 1806. By this time Adams’s career was in ruins, and he was toughing out a bleak retirement scarred by family disasters and the triumph of his political enemies. Would Adams at least receive vindication from posterity? He wasn’t very hopeful, unless historians could be forced to swear the same oath that compelled witnesses in the courtroom: “to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.”

Adams would surely have been cheered by the slant of HBO’s recently concluded “epic miniseries event” about his life, which is consistently sympathetic to its title character. And he wouldn’t have grumbled about the casting of Paul Giamatti in the role—Adams was fat, short and bald, so he couldn’t have been expecting Ashton Kutcher. Yet there was a stubbornness about Adams, a refusal to take the easy option or to acquiesce in received wisdom, that might have prompted him to hold his applause. Adams was a lot better at grumbling than applauding in any case, but there’s something about HBO’s worthy effort that doesn’t ring true.

America’s second President has traditionally gotten a bum rap from historians and the public at large. It’s not hard to see why. Even before he succeeded Washington to the nation’s highest office, he had a reputation for being irascible and vain. He made enemies easily, and he had a touch of paranoia that made his outbursts seem pompous and detached from reality. In the first half-century of the Republic, he was one of only two Presidents who failed to win a second term. (The other was his son John Quincy, who failed at what the Bush dynasty has mastered: the trick of loosening up the second time around.) Adams spent

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Riding out in the cold, again: Paul Giamatti in *John Adams*, 2008

more than twenty-five years in a bitter retirement, brooding over his mistakes and—more often—ascribing them to others. Little wonder that he was excluded from the founder pantheon, pushed aside even in his own lifetime as Americans celebrated Washington, Jefferson and Franklin—and to Adams’s horror, Alexander Hamilton.

In 2001 David McCullough’s biography presented a very different picture. Its John Adams was vain and crabby but also courageous and important. He was as much the architect of the American Revolution as any other man, and even his turbulent presidency had its noble elements. His relationship with his wife, Abigail, revealed a tenderness and (occasionally) a humility that belied his public image, and he endured personal tragedies and public opprobrium with considerable fortitude. Books about the founders were already hot property in the publishing world,

not least because the Clinton impeachment had produced endless calls for the rediscovery of “character” and “rectitude” in American life. *John Adams* went straight to the top of the bestseller lists in June 2001, but 9/11 seemed to give it a second wind with the American public. Adams, after all, was a conservative President struggling to steer the country through a time of war. McCullough’s positive spin allowed readers to embrace the prickliest of the founders and to console themselves with the fact that America had endured dark times before.

Nearly seven years later, HBO has used McCullough’s book as a template for its *John Adams*. With an impressive cast on board—including Laura Linney playing opposite Giamatti as Abigail Adams—the miniseries begins in March 1770, on the night of the

Boston Massacre, during which British soldiers guarding the customs house opened fire on a crowd of protesters. This was a key moment, not only because the patriot cause had its first five martyrs at the hands of the British. Within hours, Boston's radicals launched an unprecedented campaign to spin events to their advantage: they sent news stories up and down the seaboard establishing the American view of what had happened—British redcoats had murdered their unarmed opponents—before word had even reached London. For nearly a decade, they commemorated the anniversary every year with a charged ceremony that lambasted the British occupation, until July 4 displaced March 5 in America's collective

Adams treated the summer of 1776, not battlefield triumphs, as the zenith of the Revolution.

memory. Adams was on the scene when gun smoke was still hanging in the air. Then, with characteristic bloody-mindedness, he agreed to represent the British soldiers in their criminal trial for murder.

It's a smart move to pitch the first episode of *John Adams* as a courtroom drama, especially because Adams seems to be on the wrong side. The filmmakers introduce their subject as a man of unswerving principle, and they lay down some markers for the episodes that follow. First, we get a strong sense of the closeness of Adams's bond with Abigail. Laura Linney watches over her husband with a wary eye and pounces whenever his character flaws peep out. "Ambition!" she cries, when she thinks he's only taking the controversial case to get noticed in Boston. Linney's Abigail spends too much time haranguing in the first episode, but the message is clear: we don't have to worry about Adams's foibles because his wife will keep them in check.

The trial also gives us an early chance to see why Adams—derided by his detractors as an autocrat, even a monarchist—didn't have much patience for democracy. The standard version of the Boston Massacre is that a group of brave protesters faced off with the occupying soldiers and received a fatal musket volley for their pains. Adams—and *John Adams*—sees it differently. The Boston patriots are led by Danny Huston's Sam Adams, second cousin of John, a demagogue and puppet master who uses crowds to stir up tensions with the British. Huston and his unscrupulous friends pack the galleries of the courtroom and try to menace witnesses into backing up their interpretation of events.

John Adams, meanwhile, stands firm against their intimidation and offers a different version of the events: the crowd was armed with clubs, and the British were forced into firing as an act of self-defense.

The truth probably lies somewhere in the middle. Boston's patriots had been spoiling for a fight with the soldiers, who had been stationed among them for more than two years; on the other hand, massacres are hard to avoid when an occupying army hunkers down in the middle of a city. But the movie presents the politics of the early 1770s as a dangerous swirl of mob violence and elite manipulation, to make Adams—with his natural disdain and caution—seem like a truer patriot than the hotheads. Soon

after he gets the British soldiers acquitted, there's a grisly scene in which another elite Bostonian, the merchant John Hancock, goads a crowd into tarring and feathering

a customs inspector working for the king. As the poor fellow is hauled away, stripped naked and doused in burning tar by the bay-ing masses, John Adams mutters, "Barbarism, barbarism!" Already, we're seeing the world through Adams's eyes: crowds can't be trusted, and the base art of democracy involves deceiving the mob into doing things that are rash or harmful or both.

How important was Adams to the American Revolution? That depends on how you define it. Adams liked to say that the Revolution started in 1759, when the British kicked the French out of Montreal, and that it was completed with the Declaration of Independence. This chronology suited Adams very nicely. He was no soldier, and treating the summer of 1776 as the crowning achievement of the patriot effort swept the battlefield heroes (Washington and Hamilton in particular) out of the frame. But most of his contemporaries, not to mention posterity, didn't see it this way; the years from 1775 to 1789 quickly became the focal point of Revolution commemoration. From this vantage point, Adams moves from a central to a more peripheral role in the founding.

In the vital years before the Declaration of Independence, Adams was a key figure in the patriot movement that was emerging throughout the colonies. He resisted the temptation to occupy a sinecure in the royal government of Massachusetts, which was his for the taking after his trial victory in 1770, and he was an early and forceful advocate of independence. Even after the shooting start-

ed in earnest in the spring of 1775, many patriots were nervous about a decisive break from Britain. Adams, on the floor of the Continental Congress in Philadelphia, was a constant and eloquent voice for separation. His impassioned pleas did a great deal to persuade his fellow delegates that they could tear themselves from their mother country without (as one of his rivals put it) "bleed[ing] from every vein."

After the triumph of the Declaration, for which Adams deserves at least as much credit as Thomas Jefferson, the picture becomes murkier. Congress sent Adams (along with Benjamin Franklin) for peace talks with the British on Staten Island in the fall of 1776, but they achieved nothing. Franklin was then dispatched to France, in the hope that Louis XVI could be persuaded to join the war on America's side. In 1777 Congress sent Adams to join his venerable colleague, but while Adams was en route the course of the war was turned on its head. General Horatio Gates defeated the British at the Battle of Saratoga, and Franklin used this unexpected success to secure an alliance with the French. When Adams arrived in Paris, he was irrelevant before he'd unpacked his cases. His sourness, particularly around the triumphant Franklin, ensured a swift recall.

In 1779 Adams returned to Europe to negotiate with the British and the Dutch. Again he had limited success. He served as the first American minister to Britain from 1785 to 1788, but he didn't resolve the pressing issues left over from the war. He spent two terms as the first Vice President, during which he was routinely cut out of decision-making by Washington and frustrated by his diminished role as president of the Senate. His single, fateful term in the Executive Mansion was marked by the disloyalty of his cabinet and his disastrous relationship with Congress. Adams managed to keep America out of Europe's wars but at the cost of alienating his party and ceding the White House to his bitter rival, Jefferson. (Adams remains the only incumbent to have skipped town at 4 o'clock the morning of his successor's inauguration.) The unhappy Adams returned to his Massachusetts farm in 1801 to pick over the details of what had happened, settling scores in his head with those who had pushed him to the margins and prematurely ended his career.

How do you package all that as a seven-episode miniseries? You can't, of course, which is part of the problem with *John Adams*. Strangely, given Adams's reputation as a rather cold figure, the most successful thing about the production is its depiction of intimacy and

quotidian experience. Most costume dramas avoid the horrors of life in the eighteenth century, but this one has amputations, smallpox outbreaks, even a heartbreakingly graphic mastectomy performed by Benjamin Rush on Adams's beloved daughter. The already infamous sex scene, which takes place when Abigail is reunited with her husband in France after a long absence, is less embarrassing than it might have been. (I imagined Laura Linney crying "Lust, John!" in an act of halfhearted upbraiding; instead, there's some tastefully blurry humping followed by John apologizing for being an infrequent correspondent.) The effect of all this is to make you appreciate the challenges of the period: the struggle to stay alive, to traverse the vast distances between family and professional duties and to make sense of the loss and death that could overturn your world without warning.

Unfortunately, the politics is a good deal more tidy and safe than these personal dramas. In the first two episodes, Adams's achievements provide such ballast that his flaws can be fully displayed. After this, the story starts to unravel, especially in its depiction of the turbulent politics of the age. The third and fourth episodes (set mostly in Europe) seem strained and misleading. The producers are to be congratulated for taking Europe seriously: many of the most famous founders spent years away from home, representing the colonies and then the states in distant capitals across the ocean. While Franklin was back in Philadelphia in time for the Constitutional Convention in May 1787, Jefferson and Adams were still absent on diplomatic service. But we find out very little about how European politics actually worked, and the urge to salvage Adams's unsuccessful missions nudges the movie into caricature.

France, in particular, is a horror show. Adams is appalled by the sybaritic behavior all around him and does his best to stand on (Yankee) principle. Franklin, on the other hand, seems happy to wave through any outrage in return for the easy adulation of his hosts. *John Adams* makes it hard for anyone to side with Franklin, who seems entirely at ease while powdered socialites encourage their tiny dogs to shit in the vol-au-vents. (The excess of Sofia Coppola's *Marie Antoinette* is staid by comparison.) Franklin is somewhere between a phony and a dirty old man: he sucks up to the French, endures their eccentric table manners and their licentiousness, then he smooches in the bath with an ancient countess while Adams palpitates. (Strangely for an HBO show, Franklin's gnarled squeeze remains mostly clothed.) Even given Franklin's considerable self-regard, the suggestion that he was a lascivi-

ous toady misses the mark, and the French scenes in *John Adams* only bolster Adams's reputation by trashing that of his more successful colleague.

Adams always saw Jefferson as his greatest rival, and historians have traditionally placed the second President in the shadow of his successor. In the series, he's always trying to bail on Congress and sneak back to Virginia, or thinking about a new portico he's planning to add to his mansion. In one amusing scene, he seems more interested in the design of a wooden chair than in the draft of the Declaration of Independence,

and both John and Abigail Adams do plenty of eye-rolling in his company. When Jefferson supports the French Revolution in the 1790s, and makes excuses for its early excesses, he seems preposterously out of touch. Worse, he seems irresponsible in his encouragement of American sympathy for France, which leaves us effectively endorsing Adams's aristocratic approach: "I have sometimes thought that the public opinion is never right concerning present measures or future events," said Adams during his retirement. If the series's Jefferson is pulling the strings of popular opinion, you sympa-



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thize with that point of view.

In reality Jefferson was a little less dreamy and he was hardly alone in trying to make the United States more responsive to its people during the 1790s. During Washington's presidency, many Americans became convinced that the constitutional experiment, with its many checks on popular opinion, wasn't working. The federal government had too much power over the states, they believed, and was set on gaining even more. Adams saw no fault with this and reasoned that the tumult in France proved him correct in his skepticism about the public will. A natural aristocracy was no bad thing, providing it was enlightened in its views and aware of its responsibilities to those less talented. Jefferson,

John Adams fails to tell the story of how Adams came to revile the industry of founder worship.

meanwhile, found himself in the awkward position of both working for the government (in Washington's cabinet, then eventually as Adams's Vice President) and trying to alter its relationship with the people at large. Adams was right to complain that Jefferson was disloyal and even dishonest at various moments in the 1790s, but the series gives no sense of the enterprise in which he was engaged: the assertion of the people's right to shape their government, despite the better judgment of men like Adams.

Jefferson could also rely on the help of James Madison, a wily politician who shared these ideas about popular sovereignty but who tethered Jefferson's flights of fancy. Madison doesn't even appear in *John Adams*, perhaps because he'd make the hero look bad. In spite of Adams's conviction that he was America's supreme political thinker, it was Madison who played the leading role in drafting the Constitution and in defending it in the Federalist essays. He also managed the House of Representatives in the early 1790s with a nimbleness that exposed Adams's clumsy touch in the Senate. Finally, it was Madison rather than Adams who talked Jefferson down from his wilder ideas, like the suggestion that property should be redistributed or that the Constitution should be rewritten every decade or two. Watching *John Adams*, you never see Jefferson the political animal or imagine that there was a practical way to realize at least some of his ideas for government. If we put Madison back into this middle ground, Adams moves further to the right: uncomfortably close, perhaps, to his nemesis Alexander Hamilton.

The Hamilton-Adams relationship, which should be one of the most compelling parts of the movie—a tale of ambition, mistrust and resentment—is a major disappointment. The first Secretary of the Treasury is a fast talker; he flits around as the older founders struggle to keep up. But after he pushes through his economic plan in the early 1790s, he disappears from the stage. More talked about than seen, he becomes the focus of Adams's fears that partisans on both sides are looking for a European war—Jefferson and his friends are keen to fight Britain, and Hamilton and the Federalists want to take on France. In the sixth episode, which chronicles Adams's lopped-off presidency, Hamil-

ton returns as a vivid megalomaniac; he plans to lead an army to the outskirts of the nation to take Florida and New Orleans from Spain (now a French ally), before doubling back to Washington and mopping up Jeffersonian supporters along the way. Adams rightly calls him mad, and the movie chronicles Adams's pyrrhic victory over Hamilton and the "High Federalists" who supported him in Congress. Adams denied Hamilton the war he craved but at the cost of splitting the Federalist Party and ceding the 1800 election to Jefferson.

It's true that Adams came to dislike Hamilton's obsession with money and that he was unnerved by his military ambitions; but what really got under his skin was that Hamilton had done a much better job than he had of parlaying service to the Revolution into prestige and power in the new United States. Of course, this was an absurd complaint on some level: Adams made it all the way to the top. Yet he always felt he was undervalued as a thinker and a patriot, and he resented what he took to be the unthinking praise poured on Franklin, Jefferson, even Washington.

The speedy ascent of Hamilton was especially hard to bear. He had been born in complicated circumstances in the Caribbean in the 1750s (Adams's summary: a "bastard brat of a Scotch pedlar"), yet he had jumped the line of Revolutionary greatness so that, as Adams later complained, Americans tended "to ascribe the whole Revolution to Washington and the whole Federal Government to Hamilton." Adams resented the way Washington seemed to lean on Hamilton in the early years of his presidency, and he became furious at Washington's willingness to support Hamilton's warmongering plans at the end of the 1790s. Washington had agreed to

serve at the head of a national army mobilized to fight the French, and Adams strongly suspected that Washington would actually return to power in the 1800 election if Hamilton managed to get his war with Napoleon. Although in his sober moments Adams recognized Washington's many talents, the association between the general and his scheming protégé skewed Adams's perspective. The public love for Washington, Adams used to say, was hot air that would lift Hamilton's balloon upward.

We get a hint of this in *John Adams*, but there's no stomach for a serious reassessment of Washington's unnerving conduct in his final years. Adams is marooned by a recalcitrant Congress and a disloyal cabinet, but he gets his French peace deal and he gets to leave the White House with his dignity intact. In the final episode, dedicated to his long retirement, the filmmakers focus more on family tragedy and on Adams's eventual reconciliation with Jefferson than on his disenchantment with America. Adams resumed his correspondence with Jefferson in 1812, at the behest of their mutual friend Benjamin Rush, and the filmmakers serve up a Hallmark Channel montage in which the lapsed friends remember what they once achieved together.

I couldn't help wishing that the movie had focused instead on Adams's gossipy, gloriously dyspeptic correspondence with Rush, which provides a useful corrective to the view of a mellowing Adams reconciled with his country. Imagine the soft photography and the schmaltzy music as Adams goes on one of his rants to Rush. "Secrecy! Cunning! Silence! *Voilà les grands sciences des temps modernes*. Washington! Franklin! Jefferson! Eternal silence! impenetrable secrecy! deep cunning! These are the talents and virtues which are triumphant in these days." That was Adams in 1806, and he wrote plenty more letters in this vein. Paul Giamatti, for one, seems to be channeling this darker Adams at various moments: in one discordant scene in the final episode, he attacks a painter who's produced a massive canvas on the signing of the Declaration of Independence, lamenting that the picture is "very bad history" and that the true account of the Revolution is forever lost. Then he has one of those mad-old-man epiphanies that often occur in lengthy biopics, and he wanders around his estate taking joy in the flowers and wishing he hadn't been such a miseryguts.

The problem is not, as some reviewers have complained, that Giamatti is miscast, but rather that *John Adams* can't figure out what it wants to be. Is this a straight adaptation of McCullough's book, with its desire

to restore Adams to his rightful place in the pantheon? Or an edgier study of a man who was in many respects politically out of touch and genuinely unlikable? Giamatti seems a great choice for the nonheroic option, and his performance often has a jagged edge that tears at the safer conclusions of McCullough's book. But he looks less comfortable in the "epic" parts, and he's too good an actor to suppress the ironies and welts of Adams's character.

The one moment at which I felt really gripped by *John Adams* was just after his triumphs in the summer of 1776. As I started watching the next episode, the action had moved to 1789 and Adams's unhappy tenure as Vice President. Suddenly, the hero of Congress was back at the head of the Senate, but his suggestions that the President be given a grand title ("His Highness," "His Excellency") were being ridiculed by everyone. What had happened to bring Adams down from the heights of the last episode, I wondered. Had he been corrupted by his years in Europe? Then, just as I was getting excited about the unfolding story, I realized that I'd mixed up the DVDs. I was watching episode five, not episode three, and the jarring jump from 1776 to 1789 was my own invention.

This got me thinking about how much better *John Adams* would be if the producers had abandoned their cautious, chronological approach, and had mixed things up in order to explore Adams's shifting motives and neuroses. Adams was more concerned about his reputation than almost any other President. There's a dash of Richard Nixon in his raking over the past and his paranoia about those who would fix his place in history. But he never managed to produce the definitive book about either his life or the politics of his day. His autobiography, written fitfully during Jefferson's presidency, takes the story only as far as 1780. His letters in retirement are filled with observations (many of them catty) about the Revolution and the early Republic, but also with bleak aphorisms about the impossibility of recovering the past. "I doubt whether faithful history ever was or ever can be written," Adams told Benjamin Rush in 1809. "The world will go on always ignorant of itself, its past history, and future destiny."

Perhaps it's this element of Adams's character—his historical defeatism—that seems most absent from the HBO series, which fixes its hero on a conventional trajectory through America's founding drama: from ambition and early success, to frustration and defeat, to redemption in his final years. The producers want us to understand how valuable Adams's contribution was: how

he was in some ways outmaneuvered and ill-used by his Revolutionary peers, but never bested by them. It's true that Hamilton comes off badly in this telling, but the other founders are left mostly intact. Franklin survives his French indecencies to offer some sage words back in Philadelphia; we never see Washington riding shotgun for Hamilton during the intrigues of 1798–99; and even Jefferson is transfigured by the resumption of his friendship with Adams.

The more interesting story is how Adams came to revile so many of his peers, and how he became such a sharp critic of

the emerging industry of founder worship during the last decades of his life. We're taught in high school to recognize that the past is political, but the effect of *John Adams* is to reduce the uncertainties, enmities and divisions of the early Republic to a consensus story about courage and sacrifice. Adams doubted that true history could be written even "300 years after the event," and perhaps he'd be flattered to discover that HBO has spent so much money placing him at the center of the Revolutionary story. I'm just not sure that even he would be convinced by it. ■

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Claire Danes and A.J. Langer in *My So-Called Life*, 1994-95

My So-Called Independents

by HEATHER HENDERSHOT

Fifty years ago the idea of a small, autonomous American TV producer would have been as farfetched as the notion that Joe McCarthy was soft on communism. Notwithstanding the airing of syndicated fare like *Hopalong Cassidy* and other low-budget programs produced by a handful of scrappy little independents, the big Hollywood studios (and initially the advertisers) created the vast majority of content aired on American television. NBC, CBS and ABC enjoyed unprecedented market power and could demand whatever terms they wanted from producers. Because serial television is created at great expense, via a deficit-financing model, the Big Three were keen to craft contracts guaranteeing them the bulk of profits from reruns. Once initial production costs are paid off, syndication becomes a license to print money. The networks—in cahoots with big players like Warner Bros. Television and Universal—profited mightily from this system for years.

Things changed in 1970, when the FCC instituted the Financing and Syndication Rules, commonly referred to as fin-syn, to break up the networks' programming monopoly. The new regulations prevented the networks from owning all of their programs and limited profits from a program to its initial run and one repeat. Largely prohibited from financing their own programming, the networks were forced to cut deals with small independent producers. Under fin-syn, complicated character-driven programs prospered because the networks signed contracts with creative people and then stayed the hell

out of their way. (This is more or less how HBO functions today.) Independent creators like Norman Lear (*All in the Family*) and Grant Tinker (*The Mary Tyler Moore Show*) brought a new, rich vision to TV. In 1981, Tinker became president of NBC and maintained the hands-off approach he had benefited from as an independent producer. Sure, *The A-Team* thrived on his watch, but so did Stephen Bochco's *Hill Street Blues*. In the mid-1980s, ABC, inspired by Tinker's example, switched to a similar production model. Among its successes were John Wells's *China Beach* and David Lynch and Mark Frost's *Twin Peaks*. In effect, fin-syn created what has often been called the second golden age of television—the first having occurred in the earliest days of TV, when live programs were produced in New York City, before the studios moved West and invented formulaic serials like *Gunslinger*.

Under pressure from the networks and invigorated by the deregulatory policies of the Reagan era, the FCC began to dismantle fin-syn in the early 1990s. The rules finally died a quiet death in 1995. Today, without regulations, networks are most likely to produce in-house by hiring companies under the same corporate umbrella, as Disney does with ABC and Touchstone Television. In the rare instance when networks do work with a truly independent company, they are likely to strong-arm writer-producers with strategies to pump up ratings. NBC had suggested that producer Judd Apatow and writer Paul Feig insert small moments of triumph into their caustic and poignant high school dramedy *Freaks and Geeks* (1999–2000). Apatow and Feig ignored the advice, made exactly the show they wanted and were shown the door—receiving an Emmy nomination shortly thereafter. When his short-

lived *Undeclared* tanked, Apatow retired from TV, turned to feature filmmaking and brought much of the *Freaks and Geeks* talent along for the ride. The last major independent, Carsey-Warner-Mandabach, creator of *The Cosby Show* and *Roseanne*, shuttered in 2005.

There is one independent creative team that has managed to soldier on: Ed Zwick and Marshall Herskovitz, who made their name with the navel-gazing and polarizing drama *thirtysomething* (1987–91). You either loved the program for its flawed, neurotic characters or you hated it, for exactly the same reason. Either way, it would be hard to deny that *thirtysomething* was groundbreaking. It was talky, it was introspective and it titrated small moments of triumph. As Herskovitz explained, the show examined how “the so-called petty issues become the major issues in people's lives.”

Maybe *thirtysomething* was whiny, but it also had ideas. The lead male characters, Elliot and Michael, were advertisers who questioned their social role. It was hard not to read Elliot and Michael's efforts to survive in advertising, at times, as an allegory for Zwick and Herskovitz's experiences in the TV industry. Indeed, after many advertisers dropped out when a 1989 *thirtysomething* episode dared to show two gay men talking in bed, the producers seemed to amp up their critique of the culture industry. Miles Drentell—Michael and Elliot's boss, one of the all-time great TV villains and an obvious stand-in for the network suits—warned Elliot and Michael not to bite the hand that feeds them. It is unlikely that *thirtysomething* would have criticized advertising if the show had been produced in-house, under ABC's full creative control.

Zwick and Herskovitz took revenge for advertisers' rejection of *thirtysomething*'s peripheral gay characters by including a gay teenager as a central character on *My So-Called Life*, a program that barely survived the 1994–95 TV season. *MSCL*, as its legions of cult fans often call it, was too depressing, too real for most viewers and advertisers. Looking back on it now, one is struck not only by the accuracy of the show's representation of tortured adolescence but also by its feminist slant. This was a show that took girls seriously, examining body image issues, mother-daughter relations, anxieties about sex, and the joy and pain of an all-consuming crush on a boy who seemed so deep that the fact that his soulful eyes needed Visine and he couldn't express his feelings—or even read—could not possibly be interpreted as flaws. The show, largely

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because of writer Winnie Holzman, cared deeply about girls' feelings.

Given the current rise of product placement on TV, what's also striking about *MSCL* is the relative unimportance of stuff on the show. Characters wear their favorite faded old shirts over and over again, instead of highlighting designers who have contracted to promote their wares. The camera does not linger longingly on lipsticks and shoes and cute little purses, and episodes don't end with montage sequences featuring cross-promoted songs. In other words, *MSCL* may not talk about the ethics of advertising, like *thirtysomething* did, but it practices an ethics of advertising—one that fizzled out with the end of fin-syn and the rise of digital recording devices.

Today the big networks—and hundreds of smaller cablecasters—are cogs in larger companies like General Electric, Viacom

high, and promotion for General Electric, Snapple and NBC itself in the sitcom *30 Rock* is largely tolerable because of the way the show playfully makes fun of the integration strategy. But it is much more challenging to integrate products into dramatic programming gracefully. Imagine a *Sopranos* episode scripted to promote Pizza Hut or the Olive Garden.

How can a small independent production company continue in the new world of branding and product integration? It helps to already be a brand yourself. Character-driven, introspective dramatic programming is not only the bread and butter of Zwick and Herskovitz's Bedford Falls production company but also its brand identity. When Bedford Falls struck a deal with ABC in 2004 to develop *1/4 Life*, the network must have had a pretty clear idea of what kind of bang it would get for its buck. After all, ABC had aired not only *thirtysomething* and *MSCL* but also Bedford Falls's *Once and Again*

Will TV's new world of branding and product integration destroy small independent productions?

and News Corp. These behemoths produce and own most of the content their subsidiaries air, and, anxious that TiVo households will skip all the ads, networks and their corporate parents want to embed as much advertising content in programs as they possibly can. Of course, product placement is as old as TV: George Burns and Gracie Allen extolled the virtues of Carnation evaporated milk in coffee, and Ernie Kovacs made a point of smoking Dutch Masters cigars throughout his show. When the networks switched to multiple sponsorship in the late 1950s, in the wake of the quiz show scandal, they decided to keep ads and shows separate. The firewall started to crumble in the 1980s, when the VCR's fast-forward function began to undercut the power of the thirty-second spot. To counteract that, *Seinfeld* featured guest appearances by various breakfast cereals.

But product placement, while not dead, is now rather passé. Instead, producers strive for product integration. The ideal is not simply to place a product in a scene but to make it crucial—and “organic,” the buzzword of product integration—to the events that unfold. This strategy is particularly prevalent on reality shows. *Top Chef* contestants are asked to make dishes featuring Kraft products, and *Project Runway* participants design clothes for Banana Republic. Viewer tolerance for product integration in so-called unscripted entertainment seems

(1999–2002) and *Relativity* (1996–97). If *Once and Again* was often referred to casually as “fortysomething,” *1/4 Life* would be a “twentysomething” kind of show about a group of artistic, blog obsessed, lovesick friends struggling with low self-esteem... and global warming.

When ABC pulled out of the deal, it gave the rights back to Zwick and Herskovitz, who now had a premise for a show but no one to distribute it. Their solution was to break the episodes up into ten-minute pieces, releasing one segment each week on the Internet. The *quarterlife* (as it is now spelled) website is more than just a place to display the show. It's a social networking site of which the show is only one piece. As you watch it, the material around the frame incessantly reminds you of the brand you are consuming. A tag line at the top informs you that you are experiencing “a community for artists, thinkers, and doers.” Discussion forums include topics such as art, activism, money, health, love and music. It is all extremely earnest, though many entries feel like auditions for paid writing gigs. Contributors on the topic of love offer platitudes that seem lifted from *Cosmo* advice columns. Or worse, *Cosmo* sidebars. Artists tout their work ethic and include pictures of their products. One even cites Andy Warhol: “making money is art and working is art and good business is the best art.” I think Warhol was being

cynical, but you'd never know it here.

Like previous Bedford Falls productions, the show is a love-hate affair. Depending on your taste in melodrama, these kids seem either excessively weepy and self-absorbed or in touch with their feelings and genuine. The show doesn't really break new ground in terms of serial drama, but it does offer a quiet alternative to the macho *Sturm und Drang* of *Lost* and the libido gone wild of reality shows like *Flavor of Love*. And, frankly, it's nice to see a program wearing its good intentions on its sleeve, with no trace of irony. This is a show whose most insecure character actually gets sick of herself and decides to go to New Orleans to help build low-cost housing as a way to escape her self-absorption. *Quarterlife* bends over backward so far to merge the personal and the political that its spine sometimes seems to be cracking. An actual line from the show: “Disrupting the G8 conference is important work. I'm not sure you should give it up for little old me.” Still, you have to give *quarterlife* an A for effort, for insisting that “we neurotic kids can make a difference if we all just pitch in!” It's like Andy Hardy on Prozac.

Ultimately, *quarterlife* is important for raising some big questions with long-term industrial ramifications. The program is a kind of beta test for showing TV online. Is this a viable platform for initial distribution? It's a different gambit from repeating shows for viewers who missed them, as the networks do, or airing podcasts to promote (and provide plot details and teasers for) an on-air show. In an era of media convergence, little entertainment now exists on only one platform. TV shows are on TV, on the web, on your iPod and on DVD, but we still understand TV as originating on a TV screen. Can a program begin its life online and then migrate to other platforms? What are the odds for “Internet only” TV in the future? So far, cute little shows like *The Burg* and low-concept rubbish like *Roommates* have stayed squarely online. But the industry buzz is that daytime soap operas, increasingly financially strained, will begin to migrate online and lose their broadcast presence altogether.

If programs are shown online, without thirty-second spots, can they survive financially? *Quarterlife* was funded by Zwick and Herskovitz themselves, with underwriting from Toyota and Pepsi. In fact, the show opens with two of its lead characters pitching an ad they want to produce to the grumpy owner of a Toyota dealership. “We are your demographic,” the boys insist. They create a slick high-concept ad that the dealership employees coo over and the boys' friends applaud as brilliant. But the crass Toyota businessman insists that he “couldn't

see the cars." It's hard to imagine a better example of a show having its cake and eating it too. It benefits from the funding that comes with product integration but insists that it is above it all. Only squares demand thirty-second spots that clearly show the product. There's even one lefty activist character who dismisses the Toyota ad because, visible car or not, it's still an ad. The earnest young ad men insist, "We're not trying to get into the commercial industry. This is just a stepping stone." And one of them has dreams of being the next Michel Gondry.

By being critical of advertising and the Geritol crowd oblivious to the brave new world of sponsorship—a crowd so old and uncool they actually remember Geritol ads—the show tries to satisfy Toyota and not alienate viewers. On the other hand, the show's Pepsi sponsorship follows an old-school production placement approach that irks. Why are the kids riding to Las Vegas in a bus with a Pepsi logo on it, with Pepsi products littering almost every frame? It's enough to make one yearn for a thirty-second spot. Ultimately, one of the most important things about *quarterlife* is not its product integration strategies but its low budget. "The show offers an example of how the industry might rethink production costs and financing models," says Amanda Lotz, author of *The Television Will Be Revolutionized*. "The controlled budget is a significant counter-example to the extraordinary escalation in production costs for hits such as *Lost* and *Heroes*." In other words, the networks can't afford to make blockbusters only, and reality shows, while cheap, often draw a less desirable demographic. Cheaper scripted shows like *quarterlife* make good economic sense.

Still, does independent TV production have a future, if not on the big boxes on our walls, then on the little boxes on our desks or on the tiny ones in our hands? The short answer is no. Without fin-syn, only superhero producers like Dick Wolf, who created the *Law & Order* franchise (he hates the word franchise and insists that *Law & Order* is a "brand"), will have full creative control over their own content. Wolf is a major player, about as "independent" as David O. Selznick. If Wolf is TV's Selznick, the handful of struggling Internet shows are today's Monogram, the old poverty-row movie studio. A handful of the online shows may move to TV, but most will sink into oblivion. On the other hand, Michael Eisner has recently started making Internet shows, with some success. Intrigued by *The Burg*, Eisner approached creator Dinosaur Diorama for ideas and ended up with *The All-For-Nots*. With Eisner as a

poster boy for "independent" online production it's hard to see much future for more low-budget ventures, but it's neat that *The Burg* functioned as a successful calling card for indie producer Dinosaur Diorama.

Ultimately, it may be somewhat romantic to bemoan the death of independent writer-producers. They have overwhelmingly succeeded insofar as the shows created under fin-syn paved the way for the complicated characters and story arcs so common on scripted programs today. Indeed, it would be hard to dispute that we are in a third golden age of television. Some of the best programs ever created came after fin-syn—*Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Arrested Development*, *The Wire*, *The Sopranos*, *30 Rock* and *Battlestar Galactica*. Notwithstanding a sea of uneven reality shows, scripted programming has never been sharper. This became all too apparent during the recent writers' strike, when viewers faced endless episodes of tiresome unscripted softcore like *A Shot at Love With Tila Tequila*. But just because the number of great shows is at an all-time high doesn't mean the loss of independent production doesn't have important repercussions. The strike happened because talented writers weren't getting what they deserved. If you can't own your creative work, you need at least to cut a good deal for yourself, especially if the networks are going to recycle your work not only on TV and DVD but also on the Internet.

Having turned to the Internet as an alternative distribution venue, Zwick and Herskovitz did finally return to the regular TV fold. *Quarterlife* was picked up for broadcast during the writers' strike, and the episode fragments were cobbled together and censored slightly for broadcast by NBC in February. Despite a putatively strong lead-in, *The Biggest Loser*, *quarterlife* earned the lowest 10 PM Tuesday rating recorded by NBC in seventeen years. Why any programmer would imagine a gimmicky reality show about dieting fat people to be a terrific lead-in for a talky drama featuring mostly anorexic girls is a mystery. In any case, *quarterlife* quickly migrated to the cable-caster Bravo, where it ran just once as a marathon. Zwick and Herskovitz have made niche programming all along, never ratings grabbers for a mass audience, so a small cable channel may well have been the best place for them. But Bravo's bread and butter is reality shows, and it's likely that viewers preferred the bona fide, talented young artists of *Project Runway* to *quarterlife*'s supposedly artistic kids endlessly circling their problems. Could this be *Auf Wiedersehen* to the last of the independents? ■

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Things Fall Apart

by FATEMA AHMED

In December 1956, the poet and architectural campaigner John Betjeman speculated about another English writer in the pages of *The Spectator* magazine: "I have never heard anything about the personality or appearance or age of one of the best of English novelists, Patrick Hamilton, whose *Hangover Square*, *The Slaves of Solitude* and *Mr Stimpson and Mr Gorse*, seem to me in the top class of novels. What is he like?" A statue of Betjeman stands in London's newly reopened St. Pancras station, in recognition of his efforts to preserve the building from being demolished in the 1960s. As for Patrick Hamilton, he is best remembered for being an interwar British writer who demolished himself with drink. The novelist J.B. Priestley, an early champion of Hamilton's work, described his protégé as "an unhappy man who needed whisky as a car needs petrol."



Patrick Hamilton

Since Hamilton's death from cirrhosis in 1962, his books have struggled to stay in print, and despite the regular appearance of new editions with proselytizing introductions by his admirers, he remains, in the words of one of his three biographers (all of whose Hamilton books are out of print), "an eerie non-presence in modern British literary history." In his introduction to the New York Review Books reissue of *The Slaves of*

Twenty Thousand Streets Under the Sky

By Patrick Hamilton.

New York Review Books. 511 pp. \$17.95.

The Slaves of Solitude

By Patrick Hamilton.

New York Review Books. 242 pp. \$14.95.

Solitude, David Lodge puts this down to a lack of academic interest in Hamilton's work, which is "neither modernist nor consciously antimodernist" and contains "no anticipations of postmodernism." It's not an entirely convincing theory: by this reasoning very few English novels of the 1930s and '40s would be read at all.

Patrick Hamilton was born in 1904, the youngest of three children. His father, Bernard, trained as a barrister, but after inheriting £100,000 on his twenty-first birthday he had no reason to practice law. Bernard Hamilton devoted the rest of his life to spending his fortune on mistresses and foreign travel (he combined both interests when he went to retrieve a mistress from Canada) and ignoring the decline in his family's living standards. The last servants left when Patrick was 12, and his mother moved with the children into the first of a series of boarding houses. He left school at 15, and his brother-in-law rescued him from shorthand typing by offering him a job in a theater as an actor and assistant stage manager. Hamilton's first novel, *Monday Morning*, was published when he was 21. (There's no reason to read it now except to enjoy schoolboyish lines such as, "Have you ever noticed the topping way Betty looks worried about her homework?") Two more autobiographical novels followed, the first set in a theater, the next in a boarding house. The most successful year of Hamilton's life was 1929: *The Midnight Bell*, the first part of the trilogy *Twenty Thousand Streets Under the Sky*, was published, and his play *Rope* began a long West End run. (Hitchcock later turned it into a film.) Hamilton wrote to his brother Bruce about the thrill of success: "It is all a strange Byronic dream. For it is not only the money—it is *fame*." Outlining his theory of the novel in another letter, he wrote:

There is only one theme for the Hardy-cum-Conrad great novel—that is, that

this is a bloody awful life, that we are none of us responsible for our own lives and actions, but merely in the hands of the gods.... It is all, of course, profoundly true, and bears no actual relation to life whatsoever.... Everybody knows, in his heart of hearts, that it's a first-rate existence if only one or two things would go right.

During the rest of Hamilton's life, things mostly went wrong. In 1932, he was knocked down by a car in west London and dragged along the street for several yards. He was lucky to survive and regarded himself as disfigured by the facial injuries he suffered. Afterward he would refer to the accident as "When I was killed." Hamilton hated cars for the rest of his life, and his fictional villains were usually car owners. Alcoholism ran in the family, and Hamilton had more reasons to drink heavily after his mother, whom he adored, committed suicide in 1934. Bruce Hamilton reckoned that his brother was drinking three bottles of whiskey a day by the 1940s. Hamilton wrote his two best novels, *Hangover Square* (1941) and *The Slaves of Solitude* (1947), in this decade, but his complicated personal life distracted him for most of the next; from 1948 until his death, he shuttled between his wife and his mistress (even after divorcing the former and marrying the latter his indecision continued). A self-reinforcing cycle of drink and depression and a drought of professional success led to thoughts of suicide. In 1957 Hamilton underwent a course of electric shock therapy. The depression lifted a little, but he published nothing in the five remaining years of his life.

The characters who stumble through *Twenty Thousand Streets Under the Sky* divide into two camps—naïve loners or manipulative survivors—but Hamilton shades the picture by making them take turns as exploiter and exploited. The trilogy's parts also share a time scheme—the action of the third novel takes place in parallel to that of the first—but each part is self-contained as well. In *The Midnight Bell*, Bob is a barman at the pub of the novel's title. He was once a sailor and is working in the pub only until he achieves his true ambition of being a writer. Bob isn't actually writing anything (a few of his stories have been turned down by magazines) but likes to imagine his future success: "Dreams were his life, were becoming more and more his life, and he worshipped at the shrine of dreams." Ella, the *Midnight Bell*'s barmaid, is in love with Bob. She is "clean, practical, virtuous and not without admirers" but invisible to Bob, who

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finds her “optimistically and irritatingly neuter.” Bob is “a favourite everywhere” and Ella, wondering what he does on his afternoons off, suspects him of an attachment. However, Bob is too wrapped up in himself to find anyone else interesting: “Bob was not unaware of his advantages.... He was, for this reason, supremely sure of being able to get a girl when he wanted one, and so (because Providence has arranged that we may sometimes get what we want but never want what we get) he did not really want a girl.”

Bob's other source of satisfaction is the £80 it has taken him seven years to save. His self-satisfaction starts to crumble when he meets a prostitute called Jenny and falls in love with her. In a series of meetings she gets him to part with his savings while offering him nothing in return. Bob's romantic idealization of Jenny may explain his avoidance of sex, the only thing she does seem willing to offer, but it's impossible to take such a one-sided affair seriously: “So elusive had she always been that he had developed towards her the passion almost of a collector rather than a lover.” After Jenny cons Bob out of the last of his savings, he gets drunk and spends the night in a flophouse. The novel ends abruptly with Bob dismissing thoughts of suicide and deciding to become a sailor again. Hamilton read and admired Dreiser, and *The Midnight Bell* ends with a passage as awkward and trite as the final paragraphs of *Sister Carrie*:

The solution—salvation! The sea! Why not? He would go back, like the great river, to the sea! To the sea of his early youth—the mighty and motherly sea—that rolled over and around the earth!... For because of this power of glowing and resolving, and straining still to rise, Bob, weak as he was, revealed, perhaps, something which was far greater than and embraced himself—something which he shared, perhaps, with the whole race of men of which he was so insignificant, needy, and distressed a member.

The Midnight Bell is the most sentimental part of the trilogy; it's also the most autobiographical. In 1927 Hamilton fell in love with a prostitute called Lily Connolly. The affair was as unsuccessful as Bob's affair with Jenny, but Hamilton did better than his hero by coming out of it with material. For instance, the letter Jenny writes excusing her failure to show up at an arranged meeting is a near-transcription of a letter Connolly wrote to Hamilton. It would be going too far to suggest that Hamilton pursued Connolly so that he could write about her—he had a lifelong interest in prostitutes—but, as

he explained to Bruce, he did think of the idea for the trilogy around the same time he knew her: “I daresay you know it's always been one of my leading ambitions to write about the life of servants—particularly female ones—and their oppressed hideous condition. And it's also been my ambition to write about harlots.”

The Siege of Pleasure (1932) begins the week after Jenny has abandoned Bob and taken his money; it then goes back in time to tell the story of how she became a prostitute. It's a slight novel, just over 100 pages. The plot turns on Jenny's decision to drink a single glass of port; she then gets into the wrong crowd (car owners, of course) and loses her job as a live-in servant. The narrator of this novel knows no more about Jenny's motives than Bob does in *The Midnight Bell*: “It is doubtful whether Jenny could be said to be the owner either of a character or conscience...she had no active evil in her soul, and her gift of pleasing was as yet an invaluable discipline upon her conduct.” In *The Plains of Cement* (1934), while Bob chases Jenny, Ella, the book's heroine, is being courted by Mr. Eccles, a regular at the pub who starts to take her out and eventually proposes to her. Mr. Eccles is older and ridiculous, but he's also a gentleman: “She wondered what they would all think if they knew that there was a gentleman with a rich private income behind her, who really did think she was beautiful, and was prepared to support his opinion with fur coats and legality.” However, after a chance meeting with Bob (“now transfigured with almost unholy attractiveness”), who is just about to go to sea, she breaks her engagement and gets on with her work at the *Midnight Bell*.

The trilogy suffers from a slimness of plot, which Hamilton tries to cover with repetitive commentary. The bossy narrator of *Twenty Thousand Streets Under the Sky* is not so much omniscient as know-it-all—always circling around his characters and acting as an over-eager tour guide for the reader. In *The Plains of Cement*, Ella goes to the cinema by herself to escape Mr. Eccles but can't shake the narrator's pity: “It is a sad pass when a solitary young woman in London is so low in spirits and miserable in her thoughts that she decides she must buy herself some sweets and go by herself to the pictures.... It is the sweets which give the tragedy to the spectacle.”

Hamilton is a better writer when he lets his characters speak for themselves. He was also a playwright, but the deadpan absurdity of the dialogue in his novels is much more believable than the dated articulation of his well-made plays. This is Bob trying to raise Jenny's consciousness about her situation:



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"It's all economic, anyway. Jever hear of Bernard Shaw?"

"Yes, I've heard of him. He's one of them Great Writers, ain't he?"

"Yes. Well, he wrote a book called *Mrs Warren's Profession*—an' showed it was all economics."

There was a pause.

"Well," said Jenny, with emphasis, "I guess he was just about *right*."

In an update of the plot of *The Midnight Bell*, and in another echo of Hamilton's life, George Harvey Bone, the hero of *Hangover Square* (1941), is infatuated with an actress who manipulates him for her convenience while carrying on affairs with other men. In *Hangover Square* Hamilton bridged the gap between his gift for dialogue and his weaker narrative skills. His choice of hero helped him greatly. Bone is an undiagnosed schizophrenic who alternates between a blank, tranceless state (afterward he can't remember what he has said or done) and periods of self-awareness. Creating a more psychological novel merely through the figure of a mentally ill character could be absurdly literal, but Hamilton avoids bathos. Bone's shift between states is signaled by a "click"—"It was as though a shutter had fallen." The camera imagery soon gives way to a film analogy: "It was as though he had been watching a talking film, and all at once the soundtrack had failed. The figures on the screen continued to move, to behave more or less logically; but they were figures in a new, silent, indescribably eerie world."

The gaps in Bone's understanding create interesting spaces for the reader, too. Bone's madness is moving because his actions make so little sense, and Hamilton lets Bone's childlike non sequiturs speak for themselves. In one of his "dead moods," Bone "remembered what it was he had to do: he had to kill Netta Longdon. He was going to kill her, and then he was going to Maidenhead, where he would be happy." The more detached narration is balanced by more restrained dialogue. This forms a sharp contrast to *Twenty Thousand Streets Under the Sky* where conversations can run on for pages, as if Hamilton doesn't know what to do if they were to stop. Netta's put-downs of her devoted admirer couldn't be more pointed:

"Will you come and have a meal with me sometime this week, Netta?" he said.

"How do you mean, exactly, 'meal?'" she said.

Hangover Square is set just after the signing of the Munich agreement and, viewed

through Bone's disconnected consciousness, the event takes on a surreal air: "All grinning, shaking hands, frock coats, top-hats, uniforms, car-rides, cheers—it was like a sort of super-fascist wedding or christening." Netta and her friends are naturally in favor of appeasement. Netta's lover, Peter, is a "blond fascist" who has been in jail for assault and has killed someone in a drunk-driving accident. *Hangover Square's* politics, both geopolitical and sexual, aren't subtle, but here allegory is a huge improvement on direct authorial intervention. Bone murders Netta and Peter and kills himself after leaving a note asking someone to take care of his cat. He fails to make the front page of the newspapers, as he commits the murders on the day war is declared. The novel ends with the only headline he does get:

SLAYS TWO,
FOUND GASED,
THINKS OF CAT.

The Slaves of Solitude is set during the Second World War. Miss Roach works as a publisher's secretary in London and lives in a boarding house in a fictional riverside town called Thames Lockdon. Hamilton describes her in sexless terms—she had "the complexion of a farmer's wife and the face of a bird"—but she is seeing Lieutenant Pike, an American soldier who takes her out and kisses her on park benches. Miss Roach's fellow boarders are elderly spinsters and widows, a failed actor called Mr. Prest, and Mr. Thwaites, the most vivid of Hamilton's many grotesques. Mr. Eccles in *The Plains of Cement* was an early prototype, and Hamilton brilliantly conveys how he can bore and bully Ella at the same time: "'It changes everything, doesn't it,' said Mr Eccles. 'Love.'" (It's the placement of "said Mr Eccles" that transforms the sentence.) Mr. Thwaites is a more dislikable villain as we are closer to his victim. In this novel Hamilton actually inhabits Miss Roach's thoughts instead of merely reporting them. When Vicki Kugelmann, the German expat she has befriended, joins forces with Mr. Thwaites, Miss Roach's anguish is real but also very funny. Here she is, unable to sleep for thinking about her new tormentor: "Her words. Her expressions. Not her behaviour so much as her vocabulary!"

"You must learn to be sporty, Miss Prude.'...

"Miss Prim.'...

"The English Miss.'..."

THE ENGLISH MISS! THE ENGLISH MISS!

Miss Roach sat up in bed and took a sip of water in the darkness.

The only other character with an inner life is Mr. Prest. In the novel's fairy tale-like ending, he makes a surprising comeback on the stage and Miss Roach defeats Mr. Thwaites, inherits a small fortune and moves to London. It's a triumph for self-awareness.

Neglected writers are often overestimated in rediscovery, and Doris Lessing was exaggerating when she took up Hamilton's cause in 1968: "I'm continually amazed that there's a kind of roll call of OK names from the 1930s, sort of Auden, Isherwood, etc. But Hamilton is never on them and he's a much better writer than any of them...[he] was very much outside the tradition of an upper-class or middle-class writer of that time. He wrote novels about ordinary people. He wrote more sense about England and what was going on in England in the 1930s than anybody else I can think of."

It's possible, of course, to read Hamilton as social history—for the descriptions of Lyons Corner Houses, bed-sits and the people who work and live in them. The shabby room Jenny shares with another prostitute in *The Midnight Bell* is a typically grim backdrop:

There were two arm-chairs—threadbare, down at castors, and bursting. There was a deal cupboard, with shelves above for plates. There was a large double bed, whose sheets were grey. There was a washing stand with a jug and basin—a source of cleanliness, no doubt, but easily the dirtiest thing in the room. A towel, attached to it by a line of string, was several grades greyer than the sheets....

More "Mixtures," more Bovril, more Cod-liver oil, more Ovaltine, more Veno's Lightning Cough Cure... are consumed by these bemused and felonious creatures than in any other section of the community.

But social history is also the duller approach to Hamilton, who is too peculiar and obsessive a writer to be praised or dismissed as a representational realist. Much of his early work, including *Twenty Thousand Streets Under the Sky*, is flawed by sentimentality and a lack of narrative skill; elsewhere the writing is spoiled by a lack of material, which Hamilton overcompensates for with heartlessness. But in his two great novels of the 1940s, Hamilton for a moment looked after his talent and achieved a balance between content and style that he failed to attain in the rest of his work. *The Slaves of Solitude* is his funniest and most hopeful novel; it's also the most controlled, and the best reason for Patrick Hamilton to be remembered. ■



Hanna Schygulla and Baki Davrak in Fatih Akin's *The Edge of Heaven*

Twilights

by STUART KLAWANS

Even though I'm five decades beyond the target audience, I submitted myself to *Speed Racer*. My kids are interested; and besides, the film's perpetrators cling to a respectable image, which they acquired with *The Matrix*. The writing-directing Wachowski brothers supposedly are innovators, iconoclasts, post-whatever-the-hell philosophers working in a medium of pop thrills. But who, other than the Platonian 9-year-old boy, is meant to go *gai* with the *savoir* of *Speed Racer*?

Which figure in this retooled version of a clunky old TV cartoon might represent the audience? I'd say the Wachowskis see us as the pet chimpanzee. What oppositional, anticorporate message is conveyed to us chattering apes? Win! Win all you can! And how does it feel to be the chimp, watching this nightmare of saturated primary colors? Save your money and find out at home. Have someone squirt ketchup and mustard into your eyes for two hours.

I detain you with this abuse of *Speed Racer* only because the picture so dismally exemplifies the tradition of filmmaking-by-condiment that long ago became standard in America whenever we head toward barbecue season. Steven Spielberg's *Jaws* first laid the hot dogs on the grill, according to all the conventional histories—and if you think of summer blockbusters primarily as marketing schemes, then the conventional histories are surely right. But if you also think of summer blockbusters as bearing a definable attitude toward their content and their audience, then the true precursor of *Speed Racer* did not appear until *Star Wars*.

It was George Lucas, two years after *Jaws*, who introduced the characteristic strain: a half-nostalgic, half-mocking glorification of bygone amusements, reproduced with swag-

gering expense where the models had been cheap, and stamped with an author's name where the originals had been anonymous. With the subsequent success of *Raiders of the Lost Ark*—devised and produced by Lucas, with Spielberg hired to direct—a very fancy set of quotation marks was permanently fixed around summer “movies.”

They have a lot to answer for, those two; and though Spielberg has gone on to a more than honorable career when apart from Lucas, I can't entirely separate the director of *Munich*, *Minority Report* and *A.I.: Artificial Intelligence* from the man who has just collaborated in making *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull*. Nineteen years had passed since the last *Indiana Jones* movie. Spielberg could have walked away free, and let us do the same. Instead, he's forced on us the question of whether he and Lucas, conjoined, have anything better to offer than their Wachowskian spawn.

On an intellectual level: no. If you are a moviegoer of a certain age—and age, as we'll see, is the key determinant here—I need say no more than “Nazca lines” for you to know that *Crystal Skull* revives a techno-Aryan-occult fantasy of the 1970s: the notion that pointy-headed visitors from Beyond must have built the ancient civilizations of South America, since the natives there are too stupid to use toilet paper. I suppose I should have written “spoiler alert” before that last sentence; but what's to spoil when the premise is rotten to begin with, and the filmmakers give it away in the opening scene? Featuring un-Earthly creatures with strange powers and a series of spooky old tombs and temples, *Crystal Skull* unites two of the great Lucas-Spielberg enthusiasms, stargazing and spelunking—and never mind that the pop mythology used for the merger is uncon-

scionable. The main point is it's convenient.

And so, too, is the Lucas-Spielberg family romance. A nervy young blood, played by Shia LaBeouf, has attached himself to our hero in *Crystal Skull*. Meanwhile, Karen Allen has returned to the franchise in the role of Indiana's long-lost love. I suppose only Jones himself needs to wait for the fourth reel to find out what kind of cozy embrace is being prepared for him, amid the careening vehicles and poison darts. Indie, phone home!

As transparent as its title artifact, and just as obviously made from plastic, *Crystal Skull* conforms to type by offering a new version of old trash pleasures, only without the novelty. *Almost* without, I should say. In the role of a KGB parapsychologist, the ever-astounding Cate Blanchett glides forward as if on wheels, her pale eyes unblinking beneath a Louise Brooks wig, and coos a string of Anglo-Slavic vowels that make no better sense than anything else in the picture but are a lot more fun. The role she plays is a tired joke, but Blanchett herself is contemporary—the one up-to-date element in the movie, and the one entertainment.

The rest is weariness, of a desperate, middle-aged kind. Harrison Ford and Karen Allen do look marvelous, for people of their middle years; but their pretended reunion has all the erotic charge of a good tooth-brushing. I suppose they have to go through the motions for the sake of the kid—but he, in his way, is older than both of them. To put forth an image of flaming youth, Lucas and Spielberg have reverted to their own, making Shia LaBeouf into the leather-jacketed, motorcycle-riding rebel they admired fifty years ago when they saw *The Wild One*. For the aging *auteurs*, he's cinematic Viagra.

The good news about Lucas-Spielberg, then, is that they don't look down on their public in *Crystal Skull*. That's because, in effect, they are their own audience. The bad news is, this is all they've got to say to themselves. Thirty years ago, they set out to turn old trash into shiny new myths. Today, thanks to their efforts, even new movie trash comes out feeling old—and their own myth now plays like *Twilight of the Boomers*.

Having straddled a hyphen for all his thirty-four years, the Turkish-German filmmaker Fatih Akin has a right to tell crossover stories. He has dramatized Euro-Asian crazy love in *Head-On*; recorded musical expressions on either side of the Bosphorus in the documentary *Crossing the Bridge: The Sound of Istanbul*; and now, in his latest movie, he weaves an almost obsessive pattern of shuttlings: East-West, male-female, old-young, gay-straight. I hope American audiences won't judge this picture by the soap opera

label that's been slapped onto it, *The Edge of Heaven*, because Akin's original title gives a far better idea of where the movie ultimately deposits its characters, no matter where they begin: *Auf der anderen Seite—On the Other Side*.

To isolate just two of the lines of movement: Nejat (Baki Davrak)—pinch-faced, celibate, approaching 40—starts out in the story as a college professor, delivering lectures about Goethe in his native Hamburg. He couldn't be better acculturated to Germany—but then the path of catastrophe leads him to Istanbul, where he decides to remain as an expatriate in his own homeland. Meanwhile, Ayten (Nurgül Yesilçay)—fierce, lush-lipped, still in her twenties—travels in the opposite direction, trailing calamity all the way. A member of a revolutionary group, she leaves Istanbul as a fugitive and by chance finds temporary refuge in the home and arms of Lotte (Patrycia Ziolkowska), a student at Nejat's university.

As often happens in contemporary art-house fare such as *Babel*—and in older, more popular movies about intersecting lives, going back as far as *Grand Hotel*—coincidence comfily substitutes for social process. You will notice how Ayten's mother (played in and out of a blond wig by Nursel Köse) risks her skin working in Bremen's red-light district, whereas Lotte's mother (a plump, gray and unpainted Hanna Schygulla) dwells in contrasting and sullen suburban propriety, the point being—what? That the world includes high and low? At its weakest, *The Edge of Heaven* gives you Tinkertoy symmetries: matching shots in which caskets glide in and out of airplanes' bellies, or characters walk in and out of jail cells, or a particular landscape circles past the camera both early and late in the film.

At its strongest, though, *The Edge of Heaven* has a thrashing, furious, dirty-minded life that would disrupt anybody's pattern. In almost every scene, the vitality of the unexpected breaks out in passing details: the way bystanders applaud the cops when they haul away Ayten's comrades, or the way a detective sits inside an open window frame while conducting an interview, so he can smoke in the office. More important, there is something unpredictable in the thick, messy interactions among all the main characters: the dance of shame, politeness and sympathy that goes on between Nejat and Ayten's mother; or the headlong plunge that Ayten and Lotte take with each other while dancing in a Hamburg club; or, most moving of all, the softening of Lotte's mother before Nejat and then Ayten, after grief has cracked her shell. There is nothing schematic about the fried food, bodily fluids, streetscapes, highways and

music that course through the characters' lives. Nor does Akin want the movie as a whole to remain schematic. Ultimately, he leads you out of the film's cells and circles, to a view of the open sea. And though he brings some of the characters toward forgiveness, he leaves the final reconciliation for the future.

"How did you know who I was?" asks Lotte's mother, when Nejat comes to meet her in a hotel lobby. The answer is so obvious that he doesn't even bother to shrug while saying it: "You were the saddest person in the room." In a story that's dominated by loss and displacement, hunger and misapprehension, these two people have quietly understood each other. That's the true crossover moment.

Flash forward: It's all but impossible to tell the difference between the archival footage in Guy Maddin's *My Winnipeg* and the new images shot in jerky, snowy, vignetted black and white; truly impossible to know where autobiography and local history leave off and a left-wing, Freudian, hockey-obsessed fabulism takes over. Maybe it's a fact that Winnipeg has the world's highest rate of somnambulism—but is there really a city ordinance that guarantees sleepwalkers entrance to their former homes? Perhaps thoroughbreds fleeing from a burning racetrack once ran into the river and drowned—but did they freeze in the water, their heads raised in agony, and become for one season a popular attraction for courting couples? I know that the white-haired woman whom the filmmaker claims is his mother is actually Ann Savage, star of Edgar G. Ulmer's *Detour*; but in her re-enactments of scenes from Maddin's youth, how much of her dialogue is reproduced verbatim? I can almost believe Mrs. Maddin actually challenged her no longer virginal daughter with the bitter words, "Was it a boy on the track team, or the man with the tire iron?"

My Winnipeg refutes the conventional wisdom that other people's dreams are always boring. Maddin's dream in the film—running through his head while he dozes on a train—is that he will finally escape from his hometown. But the train just keeps rolling down the middle of the snowy streets, while Maddin sinks deeper and deeper, more and more fantastically, into nostalgia for the city of his youth. What has become of Eden's department store? Where is the beloved Winnipeg Arena? Gone—gone like ghosts, who nevertheless came back, once upon a time, at a séance held right in Parliament House, which had been built as a huge Masonic temple. Is this true? I really don't care. *My Winnipeg* opens in mid-June. I can't wait to escape into it again. ■

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BACK TALK



ADRIAN BELLISGUARD

Billy Bragg

Billy Bragg is a living legend of the British punk and folk music scenes who writes about politics and romance with equal passion. He's also an activist for progressive causes, known on both sides of the Atlantic. This spring he released his twelfth studio album, *Mr. Love & Justice* (Anti-Records). —Christine Smallwood

You recently published an op-ed in the *New York Times* about musicians' rights on social networking sites like Bebo.

I wrote the op-ed about Bebo to highlight the question of how people who contribute content to Internet sites should be rewarded for their contribution. [The companies are] building their business on free content and yet when they monetize that free content, they walk away with close to \$650 million from the sale. It does raise the question of whether those contributions should have been rewarded, because it is the content that creates those communities, rather than the host.

What's the best way to monetize that contribution?

The way that the music industry has done it so far is to go after the users. I prefer a different model. Users don't pay for radio. But that doesn't mean it's not being paid for. The business is paying because it uses the songs to attract advertising, and it pays some of the advertising revenue to the content providers. Rather than trying to criminalize their audiences, we should be looking at the business models that use music to attract advertisers and build community. People have said that websites give people free publicity. But I don't see how that's different than radio. Radio still pays a royalty. It's music and the ability to hear and exchange music that's driving a lot of the technology. Everyone says that music has value—I think they question whether it has a price. The users have found that it's very easy to get music, and unfortunately business has decided that music doesn't have a price anymore.

Do kids today expect everything to be free?

It isn't a different impulse than me taping John Peel's radio show in the evening. I couldn't listen to that entire show. I didn't like everything I heard. Half of it was horrible to my late-teen ears. But that's where I first heard the Sex Pistols. Now, we all know radio's become a lot less diverse since then. So the Internet offers the potential for hearing other things that you wouldn't necessarily hear. I would be a fool if I came out against that. I really don't want to criminalize that process. The people walking away with the big bucks are not the kid who's downloading, filling his iPod with free music. It makes a lot more sense for us to be talking to the multinational conglomerates.

So downloading is no different than making a tape?

I don't think so. The songs that they have on their iPods, are they not a reflection of their personality the way we used to buy new music to look cool? We're hopefully imbibing them with a love of music. Christ knows there's more competition now than there ever was for people to love music. By constantly wagging a finger at them, telling them they're doing something illegal—well, since the 1980s more has become illegal. Back in the old days of vinyl the British music industry used to print on the inner bag of albums a logo, a cassette with crossbones underneath it, that said, HOME TAPING IS KILLING MUSIC. How ridiculous is that? Capitalism is killing music, and I went so far as to print that on the cover of *Workers Playtime* (1988). The industry has long tried to blame the consumer for its own shortcomings. My concern is that a new generation will come along who won't be able to do what I do, which is make a decent living doing what they love doing. If we don't protect individuality and the possibility of individuality, all the music will originate in the corporations. We'll get Hannah Montana forever. A band like Radiohead or Björk or Sigur Rós will never get out there. That's ultimately what's at stake, the music to come. It behooves us older artists to make that point and make a stand. We have a voice and a platform. Nobody's speaking for the kid who's about to click on "Yes, I agree to the terms and conditions" of the website.

Tell me about the new album, *Mr. Love & Justice*.

Since the last album, around 2002, I've come to view politics in broader terms. Obviously we live in a post-Marxist, post-ideological period, so we have to rethink how we articulate the things we believe in. That process has led me to talk to my audience not about the evils of capitalism and conservatism and racism, but to focus on what I see as the thing they have in common, which is cynicism. The worst aspects of capitalism, the worst impulses of conservatives and every inch of racism is driven by cynicism. And our problem, for those of us who want to make a better world, is that we're prone to that as well. I helped to get Tony Blair elected, so you can imagine how I feel sometimes. But I also remain committed to the process.

What's it like to be rocking past 50?

I still have that same energy, that same excitement. I don't have any urge to look back at what we did in the twentieth century and say, I wish it was like that. I'm still excited to take part in things. The reaction from the *New York Times* piece has been great fun. I've been on a couple of blogs and they ripped me up, and I chucked stuff back at them and they called me names. It's been great fun. ■

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